

University of Westminster TEF Student Submission

Comment from **Student Contact, Author and UWSU President** - At UWSU (University of Westminster Students Union), although independent, we work very closely with the University to ensure that the quality of students' education and general university experience is always adapting and enhancing to meet the ever-changing needs of students. We use data collected from speaking directly to students to champion what they need and how best the university can offer a transformative educational experience for all who enroll here. Our insights into student expectations are gathered through Voice Weeks across the academic year and termly surveys. Further to this, we have a representation system, comprised of course and school-level representatives and elected sabbatical officers who are partners with their counterparts in the university to mold and respond to changes throughout the year. We know that no student voice system is perfect in perpetuity and so in collaboration with the University, we have been able to review and enhance this system in order to address the learning experience in a more action focused way suitable to the lives of students in 2022. It is this responsive and collaborative ethos that puts the University of Westminster in a strong place to tackle the existing gaps in its provision but be responsive to new and unexpected changes to HE.

As a sabbatical officer and student at Westminster I have seen the development in educational practice and how the university has given space for communities on campus to thrive. My educational experience has been transformational in more than one way. I have learnt to think critically and produce high quality work, which is needed in my current job; additionally, I have been equipped with transferable skills that help me integrate into the wider labor market. The authentic learning and teaching styles have ensured that students like me feel confident in our ability to challenge a range of perspectives and leave Westminster ready to engage in civic life and think critically to drive innovation in whatever sector we enter.

As the student contact to produce this submission, I have ensured that it includes directly what students think about their teaching collected via various means including focus groups, direct student feedback on drafts of the submission, school and course rep interviews and historic data from the deep archive collected over the last four years.

It is important to say that this submission tells a holistic story of what students at the University of Westminster experience. Our data and knowledge across the staff teams and student groups is powerful, giving authentic accounts of educational experiences. I have involved the Students' Union staff team and , our Vice President of Undergraduate Education due to their expertise in the areas of TEF and to give the wider perspective of the student voice.

I believe that academic teaching is not the only important factor that makes up quality student experience at Westminster and that there is a whole host of supplementary elements that makes Westminster a transformative institution. That said, students come to the university to gain skills, develop as people, make friends and ultimately become the best version of themselves, this is a strong and ever-present feeling both at UWSU, and at the University of Westminster.

Comment from **UWSU VP Undergraduate Education** - The COVID-19 pandemic has unquestionably impacted student expectations and consequently, the way universities operate to ensure quality education that is not only adaptive but also engaging and interactive. The University of Westminster acted swiftly in 2020 following robust conversations with leaders of the UWSU and gave students opportunities to develop and complete their education through a speedy provision of learning resources, financial hardship funds, and pastoral support. This effort showed the university senior management team's commitment to its students who come from a diverse range of backgrounds, countries and prior levels of education. Over the past few years, the university has learnt lessons from the pandemic and embedded practices that have begun to deeply impact the skills and knowledge students get from a Westminster education. New and exciting projects

have been embedded across the institution aimed to raise the quality of experience and graduate outcomes for the students and UWSU is confident that this commitment to growth is enshrined through the new Being Westminster Strategy.

Post-covid and post-introduction of the post-study work visa Westminster much like other UK institutions have seen an ever-growing market for the recruitment of international students onto undergraduate courses. This has brought in exciting chances for globalised learning and a decolonised curriculum as we have more opportunities for flipped classrooms, student-led curriculum design and student voice work. The university has committed to us to continue hearing and responding to the student's voices as we develop for the benefit of our learning community. Reforming timetable design, adapting how students feed into university student experience forums, and a review of online teaching are just a few examples of where student leaders within the SU have provoked action from the university and some of these projects already have been impacting the students at Westminster.

Students are now given the chance of engaging themselves in authentic assessments which are relevant and practically suited to their discipline. Not only has this impacted the way students gain expertise in their designated area of study but has been supported by every course having an optional year out and work experience element via a work-based placement learning program for levels 4 and 5. This has provided students with better hands-on work skills, more confidence when applying for work in their chosen field and tangible examples to draw on when applying for jobs. Even with students who are looking for part-time work and prospects in freelancing, entrepreneurship and start-ups, the support the University's Enterprise Network offers has been taken very positively by students. We understand that the University is far greater than just academics, and we want to make sure that the students are given an experience that would help them gain life skills by giving them enough time to collaborate, network, socialise and work. That is why we are working hard together with the university to give them a flexible and student-friendly timetable that enables them to do so. This is a great example of where student voice is listened to, and major projects enacted to drive change. We know there is still a long way to go in some areas of the student experience, but this decisive action tells us that Westminster is on the right track to ever improve its offer to its students.

Section 1

How have we gathered data? - The student union continuously gathers quantitative and qualitative data pertaining to the student experience and presents this regularly to the university. These insights are also used internally to inform our work practices and priorities, as well as to indicate where University of Westminster students are against national and regional trends. For this TEF Student Submission, UWSU compiled student opinion data on the elements considered in the TEF with specific focus on learning, assessment, learning environment and student voice.

We made use of existing primary research data, newly collected responses from a range of sources and direct quotations written by students this year. We believe that this submission includes an accurate and up to date perspective on the quality of teaching excellence at the university, but to be sure we have shown draft versions of the submission to students openly online and in our late November Voice Week for them to add comments and suggested changes.

The new data collection undertaken consisted of several focus groups open to the wider undergraduate student population. The focus groups provided quality qualitative information as well as confirming trends we've seen in quantitative survey analysis. The method included pre- and post-group questionnaires to ensure all angles from all participants were captured. Direct quotes in this submission have been taken directly from these responses. Exit interviews with last year's school and course representatives have been reflected in the submission where they commented on matters relevant to the TEF features of excellence. Termly insight check-in surveys ran over the past 18

months have been used to inspect student feelings on campus, including their experiences in the classroom, confidence in learning and likelihood of considering dropping out of university. The final large body of evidence used has been the work undergone by elected officers over the last three academic years relating to the adaption to online learning, enhancement of academic support provisions and growth of employability support all of which have been areas of work passionately called for by UWSU sabbatical officers.

How have we maintained independence? - the TEF student contact, attended university TEF meetings from early 2022 listening to the university's plan and developing their knowledge based on the information provided by the OfS. was supported by SU staff and joined in these meetings by the Advice and Wellbeing Manager and the Vice President for Undergraduate Education. For these meetings, university partners indicated that these three individuals are invited optionally and were under no obligation to attend, contribute or share information relating to the student submission. The University shared their willingness to support in however they need. This played out as them funding the student focus groups and Voice Week incentives for students to participate in the exercise in reviewing the student submission. They also offered time to the SU staff to understand metrics, and the university process to create their submission. They also shared all the data they were using to complete their work with SU staff.

The union staff and sabbatical officers hosted internal meetings where planning and delivery was overseen. In these meetings elected officers set out their ambitions for the Student Submission, how students will be involved and which sections they wanted to write themselves. Staff used these meetings to plan research, student consultations and collate existing data. The Union shared a draft of the submission, a full breakdown of the student comments on the student experience and the submission with the university in December before submitting it to the TEF panel. No changes were made as a result of sharing the draft with the University. Final editorial control was owned by as UWSU President and the TEF Student Contact.

Section 2

Westminster students believe that how you are taught at Westminster is different depending on the subject and school. They think this is necessary and it should be the case that each discipline has its own distinct practices relevant to the course. Practical courses focus on required skills and knowledge often prescribed by PSRBs, creative courses give space for self-expression and academic courses require students to be critical thinkers and demonstrate this in writing and seminars. It is natural for there to be variations in the student experience across the institution and this is something students both feel and comment on often and which came across in the focus groups and data analysed. Students commented on their own experiences as well as discussing what they had heard about friends' courses in other schools. When sharing what they felt was high quality teaching, students would preface these comments with; Because I study x subject, we have to do things a bit differently. This pattern was clear in the focus group members who remarked that active steps are taken to tailor the teaching styles and content to the discipline. This ethos is embedded in the university's Authentic Assessment project to review the practices across the organisation to ensure that no student is being tested in a way that would not be applicable in the workplace associated with the field. This project is warmly welcomed by students and was central in the manifesto of the VP Undergraduate last year, as something that should be championed and embedded.

On the student experience in the classroom, an overwhelmingly positive response was made in the focus groups and is backed up with wider data in the Termly Check in Survey (Sept 2022, 374 responses) which showed majority of students feel confident in engaging with their teaching and learning (85%). One student said specifically "(I have to) praise the ambition of teaching staff,

academic staff do their best to help students reach a first, and they really encourage you with your ambitions". Students widely reflected that course leaders opened doors and provided students with useful information, one student said of their course leader, "he is very very helpful, he is looking after us". Overall, there is an impression that course leaders go above and beyond to help students, and this is all a part of the transformative education experience that Westminster aims to provide.

The content taught was described by a student in the focus groups as "intellectually and creatively engaging". There is a range of feedback from students on the content of their lectures, however where students are speaking positively, they talk about being excited and inspired by the content. The ability to choose modules is something lots of students really enjoy but have remarked that these options can lead to a fragmented and spread-out timetable. There are pockets of dissatisfaction about teaching quality, which is to be expected from time to time, however the university's robust commitment to hearing these concerns and enhancing the content and delivery has been made clear in the Education Strategy worked on by elected officers of UWSU.

Along with the content, students remark that additional opportunities for learning are made available including visiting lecturers, speaker events and professionals from industry coming in to share their experiences. One student studying said "I love how tutors invite in guests with specific conditions to come and talk so that we can understand these experiences better." Students feel that those who are teaching them have high levels of experience in the field which reflects the university's ambition to recruit academics with practical expertise from industry. One student remarked that "(Due to the specialists' lecturers) I have gained technical and social skills, getting to network with others and exposed to my preferred job market." There are also examples of interdisciplinary collaboration through the Democratic Education Network (DEN) where students and staff work together in creating projects that directly address issues in society. It aims to empower students from diverse backgrounds to use education as a tool for personal advancement and collective transformation. A student officer said "DEN was a space where I could get involved with the issues that affect my community and the wider political environment in collaboration with my tutors and friends. It helped build my confidence in the new educational environments of higher education as a first year."

EDI Champions is a project where students were employed under different remits to highlight and work on issues pertaining to EDI. An EDI Champion from last year said "My role was to work in collaboratively with academic and professional service colleagues to develop Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion practices in the School of Humanities. In my case, I tasked myself with developing a workshop that would help academic colleagues, staff and students at the university understand and identify problematic behaviours. Through this role I also spoke and participated in conferences and open forums to discuss the work I was doing and learn from others. All of this helped me to gain confidence, project management skills and helped to expand my EDI knowledge."

Regarding course organisation, students appreciated the structure of their courses; particularly the opportunity to specialise during their second and third year and pick up a year in industry. The university rolled out these Work-Based Placement Learning options for all courses in the last few years specifically as an employability intervention. Students in the focus groups felt that this prepared them better for their chosen specialism after graduation. One student on optional modules mentioned that "There are so many options to choose from, this is great, and I am happy to have a more spread-out timetable if it means I get to learn so much".

Feedback on assessments, both formative and summative, is a vital component to the learning journey of students, and the prevalence of commentary on these issues reflects how important it is to students at Westminster. With a large proportion of Westminster students coming from non A-Level educational backgrounds, specific support is given to help students adapt to the academic style of writing at university. Students feel that it was especially helpful when tutors took the time to provide

feedback on extracts of assessments before the final submission, a practice somewhat common based on student feedback. One student in the focus group said “I feel that that the feedback aspect has been good, my teachers always give me valuable feedback that I can look at and learn from. I feel this results in me obtaining a high grade”.

The ability to demonstrate knowledge is the test of a student’s ability to digest good quality teaching into effective and long-standing learning. Students from day one of university often feel the pressure to perform under the scrutinous assessment aspects of being a student, however effective support can make these parts of being a student enjoyable. Students praised how some course leaders create videos to explain the guidance for assessments and found this really helped their confidence. They also commended the provision of specific guidance for different forms of assessment and suggested this gave them much more self-belief in writing assessed work.

Personal Tutors at Westminster carry a lot of responsibility and for some students the support they get from the tutors makes their experience. Data shows (Sept 2022, 374 responses) us that PTs are the most important support to students (70% of students selecting this), after friends and their community. Students recognise the high demand on personal tutors and that they have a lot of students to support which can at times lead to longer wait times for replies, however the overall feeling is that personal tutors are a real asset to them and therefore highly value the time they get with these staff. At Westminster personal tutors support students with settling into university, planning which modules to take, gaining further study skills and any matters affecting their studies. Most respondents to the early term 1 survey (September 2021, 362) said they knew how to contact their personal tutor (74%) and that they knew who their personal tutor was (77%) this reflects the focus on this support mechanism for new students settling in. There is pressure on personal tutors especially as 39% of students have indicated to UWSU that their personal tutor would be their first point of contact if they had an issue. This puts additional pressure for PTs to also field other questions including ones not in their remit. The university’s introduction of new student centers in 2022 has been a great success in supporting students with non-academic queries but the long-term impact on students of this new resource is yet to be fully quantified. By the end of the year (Jan 2022, 323 responses) 90% of respondents know their personal tutor and 74% had met with them to get support.

Each year UWSU supports new course leaders through a training program to understand and see the value of the student representation system. This is a half day training which is co-run by the students’ union and CETI. Content covers how to effectively build connections with the reps and how to flag to UWSU if support is needed. The course drives staff to appreciate the potential mix of constructive and non-constructive feedback they might get from reps. It attempts to equip the staff with an open mind to co-creation and trusting students to help them find solutions to gnarly pedagogic road bumps. It encourages them to be open with students and build candid rapport about the challenges of teaching a diverse cohort. One way the SU is enabled by the university to support staff is through the provision of templates for student rep meetings and we collect these for our reporting at the end of the year. Over the past few years, but paused for COVID, UWSU ran an awards scheme to gain a clear understanding from the student perspective what good teaching and learning is and work in partnership to celebrate best practice. These awards in 2019 saw 250 nominations celebrating excellence in championing wellbeing, educational experience, innovation, and inclusivity. This was students, through the SU celebrating staff who they deemed as providing excellent teaching. One example of a submission for an award winner was “_____ is an amazing teacher. (They) taught us to embrace our roots and different theories that explain diversity. During her teaching she reassured me that we understood the topics, always provided excellent constructive feedback and supported my learning. (They) supported us in all the different disciplines, always was professional and reassured that all the students were happy with the course. She took all our concerns into consideration, for her,

all student's voices matter, she always was fair and supported every single student. (They) helped me to think critically about different themes such as gender and race, and her classes were crucial in understanding my own identity." This is just one of many examples of the positive reinforcement towards academic staff that the university and union together have provided.

According to the Termly Check In Survey (Sept 2021, 362 responses), 88% of students rated support services at the university of Westminster as meeting or exceeding their expectations and outline that the most important support to them is academic, employability and financial support. Students feel they have excellent access to online resources specifically e-texts, journals and extracts which are essential to their studies. This was summarised by one student as "The university has great resources, practical laboratory facilities, and online library facilities far above anywhere else I've been before". The university offers powerful self-service tools alongside detailed videos and guides on how to perform literary reviews and how to effectively navigate through the expansive archives. In addition to this, the physical libraires, which have recently been upgraded, offer students space to study socially and independently near support staff. One student reflected "In my first week, I was given a library introduction session that helped me overcome the daunting size of the library and I felt excited about the range of ways I could use the library support." One student remarked that the library team "helped direct me towards useful resources including literacy for essay writing tools" and that "they helped resolve any issues that came up during my time of study."

The popularity and thus demand of these spaces for independent study is high and on occasion leave students reporting it hard to find space. An example of a student perspective is "Being able to access study spaces has helped get a lot of course work done at Uni itself, but more areas could be added as sometimes it gets too crowded." This year, however, the library footprint has grown with a refreshed library space in the Cavendish Campus to which one student said, "(The) newly refurbished Cavendish library is great and spacious encouraged me to go there and revise." This development has been done to meet the high demand to use these spaces and there are plans shared with sabbatical officers to dramatically grow them further in the next few years.

Students in our recent focus groups shouted praise for the technical equipment, software and general provision offered by the University. High quality and state of the art facilities support many courses taught at Westminster and students have recounted how this impacts their learning experience. In Harrow, students report how social study spaces have been built with the kind of group work they do on their course in mind. That the open-plan spaces invite creativity and make students extremely glad to be back learning in-person after the covid pandemic. DCDI (Department of Creative and Digital Industries) offers it students high quality workshop spaces which one student commented that "When working in the creative studio spaces, we had access to resources and displays of past students' work which fueled my creativity and motivation." These spaces are designed to be for students and at the heart of the campus with support not far away. One student said "As a fine art student, we have our own studios and the tutors' offices in one space. It makes it easy to just knock on the door if you need someone to talk to." Another student said "I really like the Fabrication Lab and Architectural Studios. They are fully equipped with industry-standard machines and essential courses to ensure you are well-knowledge to operate the tools. I also really appreciate how friendly the staffs at the fabrication lab in helping the students in physical making." This positivity about the campus spaces also was expressed for the Regents Street computer rooms, the Cavendish student hub, silent zones in libraries and individual pods for study. Students also shared positive feedback on the software and hardware they have access to through their course. When asked what part of their learning experience is high-quality, students shared, "The lab tech and equipment," "being able to hire laptops and camera equipment" and that "whilst at the campus, I don't have to look for an area to study as I can do it in a quiet space at the library and I don't have to bring my laptop with me to do my work as there is plenty of resources available." Overall students have shared overwhelmingly positive feedback about the

campus and how it is used to support their learning however the post-pandemic levels of students on campus have led to students calling for more quiet spaces away from the crowds where they can study and relax between taught sessions.

Students at the University of Westminster have a direct say in how their courses are run and are invited at various levels to give feedback on their experiences. Students are seen as partners in their educational experience and the vast majority of staff welcome feedback on their course structure and support systems. Each year a comprehensive review of the NSS scores takes place and areas where student satisfaction scores are low are investigated. Low scores in the NSS and other opinion data are attended closely by senior academics and management at the University. This commitment to improving student satisfaction is shared by UWSU and gives energy to student representative systems and pathways. In addition to the usual response by the university to courses with lower student satisfaction, UWSU has been funded by the university to engage with targeted interventions. These are one off or a series of events bringing together students and staff to build an academic community (see Partnership Projects).

At the course level, the staff responsible meet with student representatives 4-5 times a year and build a strong relationship and keep communication channels open all year. UWSU in partnership with the university trains 700+ reps each year to effectively contribute to where issues have occurred and novel ideas on how to alleviate the concern their peers have. Most of the time these issues can be resolved at the course meeting. However, on the occasion where these issues speak to more structural or policy-based infrastructure the union can escalate these through the staff or elected officers into Student Experience Committee (SEC, now Student Voice Forum), Academic Council or if needs be, to the Vice Chancellor directly who meets with the SU regularly. Across the year three Course Rep Forums take place where course reps gather en-masse and discuss their issues collectively in the audience of school reps and their elected officer team. They work to conceptualise some of the key issues taking place across courses to bring to the Student Voice Forum attended by senior management of the University.

Adjacent to the course representatives are the School Reps who are paid a stipend to gather feedback across a school and these are reported on at the SEC. Last year, 2021/22, 18 undergraduate and 10 postgraduate students were working across the university and union in these roles. One school representative from last year said this of the role: I feel I have gained real benefits from being a school representative and it has really allowed me to gain confidence in these skills. Overall, I feel it has given me opportunities to test my leadership, time management and public speaking skills. I have gained an understanding of how the structure of feedback is handled within the university and the channels it goes through. Through this work I have seen the importance of building relationships with stakeholders and communicating clearly with them, including heads of school and course leaders. All this I gained from attending school rep forums and school council meetings and writing up my reports for these spaces.

Some examples of changes made from the result of school rep work last year were; Media students can now access editing suites over the weekend if they request it in advance and working hours during the week have also been extended. Also, there is a new email address where students can quickly contact IT support for editing problems, as communications were not very efficient last semester. Timetables were available to students a few weeks in advance this semester after a conversation between a UWSU sabbatical officer and the head of school. One major barrier identified throughout this work was that students have lots of ideas to share but can find some of the technicalities of university governance structures confusing and academic policy intimidating. Last year funding for a Policy Coordinator within UWSU was made available by the university to help students navigate policy, meetings and better prepare students for these. The aim was to improve the organisation's ability to gather and act on student feedback in these settings. The early signs are that

students feel better prepared for their meetings, more informed about structural aspects of the university and feel more understood and heard in meetings. In 2022 UWSU ran a set of exit interviews and a School Rep Feedback Survey around the experience of school reps. These reflections were reported on, and across the school and course reps there was overwhelmingly positive feedback on their experiences. 95% (Sample size - 265) of respondents mostly or strongly agreed that they had gained valuable skills and felt more employable because of their experience as a representative. On top of this the university runs Student Module Evaluations (SMEs) part way through teaching to collect student commentary. The university's commitment to hearing the voice of students and acting on this has been shown in this area through the review of the dashboards that show the data from these SMEs. Changes have been developed and implemented to allow students to track the progress of their feedback and for staff to see and respond quicker, shared with the wider course group.

Partnership Projects

FANS Scheme - The FANS scheme has been running for 10 years and it is an important part of both the University and the Students' Union. It is one of the most successful partnership projects with FANS now being well imbedded into the welcome and orientation process. The scheme's purpose is to ensure new students receive a personal welcome and students settle into Westminster whilst limiting feelings of isolation. Current students (level 5 and 6 students) are recruited as FANS as it is current students who have the real understanding of what it is like to start at this university and what it's like to be a Westminster student – the FANS role comes from a student perspective. It is essential that students go through a recruitment process to be selected for the position (this includes application, assessment and or interview and course leader feedback). FANS are allocated a group of students from a set course who they look after for the duration of the role, this ensures that the new students have a constant, familiar person who is there for them. FANS differ in the sense that as well as speaking to their students, they are also required to show their students different aspects of university life. Examples of this include understanding how the university works, campus & library tours, getting familiar with the local area and parts of London (London Living tips) how to use Blackboard, social activities and making friends, helping course leaders with course orientation and academic sessions, signposting, advice, tips, and supporting student wellbeing. This year along over 120 students were trained and over 2500 new students had support from their FANS.

Through the training FANS receive they are given the ability to deliver an engaging, personal, student-led welcome that is face-to-face in nature. This means within the first 6 weeks of the student journey FANS were able to bring students together, help them make friends and integrate them into the Westminster community. FANS help students learn more about the university structure, facilities and courses. FANS help make students aware of UWSU by running an introduction session and encouraging involvement with the SU. This includes helping students to get involved in societies and various groups. FANS offer daily sessions covering a variety of topics, which students join if they choose to (approx. 12 different sessions are offered to students). After the first 2 weeks FANS stay connected with students during weeks 3 –6 via message and email, sending frequent tailored communication. The combination of FANS led sessions and communication allows FANS to build relationships with students, as a result students feel comfortable engaging with their FANS, which in turn this has a positive impact on the student's wellbeing and engagement within the university. Many students who have had FANS tend to go onto apply for the role the following year, showing the positive impact this program has on students. One student said: "Our FANS were not only super helpful and detailed in their tours, tutorials, emails, and answers to our questions about the university and course, but they were extremely enjoyable to be around and made our Welcome week very fun and an exciting start to uni life. My experience with them as our FANS has been entirely positive and they are a reliable source of support as both members of the student union and as genuine new friends"

The FANS themselves say the role is a positive experience, which impacts positively on both their university experience and with skills they gained from the role, these include employability skills and supporting others. 98% (sample size 98) of FANS stated after their FANS role they are confident with supporting a student access the correct University or UWSU service when facing a well-being issue and 95% of FANS stated the FANS role has had a positive impact on their employability skills.

Academic Communities - The Academic Communities Project is all about building groups of students and hosting events that are based around the students' academic subject. This is an extension of UWSU's work on academic societies and our peer support work funded and supported by the University for 2022-23. The primary focus is to bring students together who have a common interest usually through having similar chosen courses. It is well known that students are more likely to join groups that are rooted in their course and will benefit their studies. This project will help students form relationships with others where they spend most of their time while at university. Through this, we aim to give students a sense of belonging which we saw take a big dip during the pandemic. These are distinct from societies as they are inherently about student voice and link directly into the university department running the subject, and are targeted interventions based on areas where NSS scores and UWSU insights indicate needs attention. These communities will become a resource for not just students but for course leaders and professionals involved in peer to peer enhance learning, students as co-creators and to grow connections between students and staff. When academic communities are set up within a course, students can organise and join various events which can either be social or co-curricular events looking to enhance the student's skills and knowledge for employability. One student said about these groups, "Students come from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences that we can all learn from as much as we learn from the tutors and academics. Joining societies is a good way to access and glimpse taught content (academic) and interests (non-academic) from other degrees." The project has started well and will only grow in the next few years.

Voice Weeks - Voice weeks are designated spaces across the academic calendar where the union and university perform mass listening exercises. This was something designed collaboratively between the University and Union, with the theme being set by the union and data shared in the university Teaching Committee each time. In 2021/22 two voice weeks were held to gather feedback on students' concerns regarding their academic experience and student wellbeing. In 2022/23 this project has grown to happen four times across the year. Aside from having a physical presence to encourage students to submit feedback, communication is also tailored through email campaigns and social media awareness and shared directly with student groups and their members. More recent voice weeks have covered the cost-of-living impacts on students and the TEF. The data collected was used at the Student Council to work on suggested outcomes, directly inform SU work and shared with the university to respond to. Recent positive feedback gathered at a voice week was emailed directly to the staff who were mentioned as a pre-Christmas boost to say thank you.

Section 3 - Student Outcomes

Students come to Westminster to gain skills and knowledge to equip them for life after university and the professional field they wish to work in. The university offers a range of in-classroom support for skills development and additional opportunities to enhance their key employability skills. Students are encouraged to opt-in to these sessions and schemes, with those who do so being better prepared for life after their undergraduate degree. Of the students completing the UWSU Termly Surveys, employability support was used by 32% and rated as important by 41%, but a similar proportion of students still wanted to see more support offered (34%). Students' knowledge of this support expectedly grows as they progress through their studies and also becomes more important, with final

year undergraduates being the biggest users and valuers of these services. This data is from January 2022 and has since triggered the commissioning of UWSU to employ 2 FTEs to work solely on connecting students to skills development and employability programs running at University of Westminster. These two roles are focused on bringing in experts in employability and skills development, including one event recently held about being a disabled person at work and how students can navigate this to their benefit.

Participants in the focus groups rated the Westminster Employability Award (WEA), Westminster Employability Network (WEN), CV workshops and the Engage system very highly. From day one on campus, students are made aware of the vast support available to them at welcome fairs and in induction weeks. All students can pick up work-based placement learning, and their study timetables are made to allow part-time work to be completed. Westminster's student population is broad, but students like to participate in all kinds of extra-curricular activities including volunteering with the students' union, working and participating in sport. The University employability service supports students to translate these interests and experiences into attractive CVs and applications for work after their studies. Westminster Employability Network's activities were described as 'incredible' in how they help students develop their skills. with one student sharing in a focus group that they were able to get two jobs on campus through these. The Engage system is a bespoke feed for students of work and training opportunities which are tailored to the course they study and the details they provide. When we asked students which educational gains they have made while at university and what skills they have been equipped with, we had some very clear feedback. "The most important aspects I've gained are critical and analytical skills, and subject knowledge. In general, my experience as a student at Westminster has positively contributed to my development as a student and as a person." At the start of this submission, the point was made that students come to the University of Westminster from all levels of academic experience, and all parts of London and the world. They come to this institution for a transformative educational experience that equally challenges and supports students to reach their ambitions. There is support of all kinds for those who reach out and grab it and this "seek and you will – achieve" is apparent in the students' responses.

Students at Westminster can feel the stretch of a challenging educational experience, but also feel supported by staff to develop themselves. A student described this with, "I feel that I have gained an invaluable approach to my field of study that I would not have found otherwise. I am still in the midst of developing my critical thinking and writing skills, but I feel confident knowing I have the support of my tutors." While another told us, "I feel like I have gained a number of transferable skills and academic knowledge. I also feel like I gained valuable advice from workshops and my personal tutors or alumni. I have also made friends along the way who share a similar mindset to my own when it comes to our studies which has motivated me to perform well."

The graduate attributes for Westminster are being critical and creative thinkers, being literate and effective communicators, being entrepreneurial, being global in outlook and community-engaged and being socially, environmentally and ethically aware. Although students might not use these words directly themselves, in conversations with UWSU, students seem to clearly feel the movement towards these. One student summarised this well by saying, "from my time here, I have had the opportunity to be in spaces to engage with others who look like me, delve deep into the course content and build skills that have set me up for work. Despite Covid, there were still so many opportunities to improve myself and make the most of this time and connect with students with similar interests and passions."