

TEF Student Submission – Coventry University Group

1. Introduction

This submission has been compiled by the Students' Union).

Team at Your SU (Coventry University

Acronyms used:

OFS: Office for Students, UG: Undergraduate, PG: Postgraduate, CAW: Centre for Academic Writing, CU: Coventry University, CULC: Coventry University London, EEC: Engineering and Environment Faculty, FAH: Faculty of Arts and Humanities, HLS: Faculty of Health and Life Sciences, FBL: Faculty of Business and Law, NSS: National Student Survey, MEQ: Module Evaluation Questionnaires.

The submission has been approved by the Students' Union Affairs Committee representing all students across Coventry University Group (CUG), including London, Coventry and Scarborough campuses.

No specific primary data was collected for this submission as Your SU has established student voice feedback mechanisms. Secondary source material used includes; Course Representative Surveys and Feedback, NSS results, MEQs and Your SU research reports and surveys. The student reports/surveys used were the Digital Learning Survey (October 20, sample: 212), COVID Student Feedback Report (Feb 21), Welcome and Assessment Feedback (September 21, sample: 340), Assessment Feedback (November 20, sample: 378), BAME Awarding Gap research (April 22) and Academic Affairs report (October 22).

The range of courses considered is comprehensive but excludes transnational education provision, postgraduate courses and Coventry University Poland. Access has been granted by CUG to a range of data to support the production of this document. There has been no attempt to influence the content of this submission.

The submission is split into the areas of Student Experience: Teaching, Assessment and Feedback, Student Experience: Resources, Support, Quality and Student Engagement and Student Outcomes

Each area has initial data analysis followed by relevant case studies. These have been provided to show context to the themes as they highlight aspects of the student journey, student groups who require specific interventions to improve the student experience or more detailed views of the CUG response to the pandemic. They are not intended to suggest a viewpoint for the majority of students.

2. Student Experience

There have been an extraordinary set of circumstances that have affected the student experience since the last TEF assessment. Your SU acknowledges that the pandemic has meant the institution has had a 'once in a lifetime' set of circumstances to work within.

Taking the 'overall satisfaction' score in the NSS as the most likely indicator of general satisfaction shows positive figures compared to the sector. Since 2018 only one year (2020) has seen a drop below

the sector median. Your SU is particularly pleased to see the increase in score from 76.1% in 2021 to 79.0% in 2022, which shows satisfaction is improving as the impact of the pandemic fades. It is also worth noting that in most questions outside of overall satisfaction, CUG is above the upper quartile of institutions suggesting the students see their experience at CUG as very positive. The main area falling below expectations (though still above the sector median) is 'assessment and feedback', which is covered later in this submission. Your SU is sure that CUG is committed to improving student experiences. This is reflected in the positive relationship between Your SU and CUG and the willingness to work together to identify areas where the student experience needs to improve.

2.1 Teaching, Assessment and Feedback

2.1.1 Teaching and Learning

Overall, NSS trends show that the collective questions for 'the teaching on my course' have demonstrated a score predominantly above the sector upper quartile over the past five years (on 4 out of 5 occasions). This figure has increased from 81.6% to 83.6% from 2021 to 2022. This is a positive achievement for our members who view their teaching to be of quality.

It is noted that this positive 'teaching on my course' feedback (recorded for 2022) predominates across all faculties, although the faculties of EEC and FBL fall below the sector upper quartile (though remaining above the sector median). The area of concern at a school level is with the 'International Centre for Transformational Entrepreneurship', which is below the sector median scores. However, its performance has improved over the past few years, indicating that positive plans are in place.

It is worth highlighting that the highest scores were in CU Campuses in Scarborough and London. It is notable that the positive teaching experience is not diluted by distance.

The NSS tells more of the teaching story than just the overall positive quantitative headlines. Comments made by students provide a narrative as to some of the challenges they face. Overall the qualitative comments for 2022 have been categorised as more positive than negative (60% to 40%), but there are a couple of themes of note.

CUG have categorised comments regarding staff conduct as 70% positive to 30% negative. These are themed around the friendliness and approachability of teaching staff with student feedback including that "some lectures were unhelpful, rude and did not try to support, just shunned me off..." however this is contrasted with the 70% of positive comments (notably being around being friendly and approachable) such as stating "great course, very well taught. Great lecturers".

There were more positive comments than negative (60% to 40%) regarding teaching quality. Within CUG there is a strong system at a course, school, faculty and location level to identify poor feedback and act on it. This is a process co-owned by CUG and Your SU. CUG also fund activities to praise positive feedback, such as the 'I Love My Course / Staff' initiatives organised by Your SU.

Your SU is pleased with the CUG commitment to analysing and acting on MEQs as this is a chance to improve students experiences during their course rather than waiting for the NSS results to act. The Autumn 2022 MEQ responses show a very positive score for satisfaction with the 'teaching on my course' of above 80%. This is encouraging and suggests further improvement.

2.1.2 Case Studies of Teaching Experience

2.1.2a COVID Case Study

In February 2021 Your SU produced 'Feelings of the Student Body in the Light of the Pandemic' report (hereafter known as Covid Student Feedback Report). It identified that the pandemic response necessitated defined standards for online teaching and platform use with access considerations built in and that staff were sufficiently trained to meet these standards. The report identified that most students still wanted the option of an on-campus learning experience in some capacity. They valued and expected to have safe access to lecturers, facilities and services on campus. CUG committed to 5 hours of on-campus teaching and learning each week for taught students, which was positively received.

"When I attend my face to face seminar on campus it's different because I can ask all the questions I need and we connect more with the lecturer because there is way more help and guidance."

Feedback was received from students wanting reduced fees / refunds. Students felt that restricted access reduced the value of their course and their experience and impacted their skill development. Although CUG did not reduce or refund tuition fees – the positive satisfaction scores compared to the sector suggest that students were generally more satisfied and appreciative of CUG's response and the digital teaching and learning environment provided than at most other institutions.

2.1.2b Case Study: Eurocentric Curriculum

It is vital that the student experience is positive for all students at CUG – particularly those from marginalised backgrounds. In April 2022, Your SU delivered a significant report on the experiences of students to help address the BAME Awarding Gap. As part of the study, participants were asked if they felt confident in sharing their viewpoint in classes as BAME students and the extent to which they felt the curriculum on their course reflected issues of equality and diversity. Responses revealed students were aware of the impact the curriculum had on their educational experience with the majority of students suggesting that their curriculum was not inclusive and did not take steps to address issues of equality, diversity or inclusion explicitly.

'Most of the examples and case studies we use in our study or lectures are based on things happening to Europe or the UK here, or in the US, I rarely see case studies about Nigerians or Africans being used in our lectures. So, it's, it's difficult, to share my opinion on a topic when I don't understand how it affects me... it gives the advantage to the British students and the European students.'

The findings of the report are being actively reviewed by the senior leadership of CUG and the Curriculum Transformation Project is helping to address the concerns raised in the report.

2.1.3 Assessment and Feedback

CUG students consistently identify 'assessment and feedback' as an area lower in satisfaction than other questions in the NSS. This is reinforced by Student Rep survey data (November 2021) that demonstrated that although students felt their 'assignments briefs to complete my assessments were clear' (81.6%), only 71% felt that 'the feedback I received on my assessments will help me to improve in future assignments'.

Qualitative comments (NSS 2022) show that for assessment and feedback, there are more negative comments (70.2%) than positive. Overall, most comments concern feedback, followed by assessment and then marking criteria / fairness.

On feedback, the negative comments were classified as predominantly regarding timing, followed by quality of feedback. 80% of comments on the timing of feedback were negative. One comment stated, 'would appreciate feedback and grades back on time and not 2 months after the submission'. Comments concerning issues with quality included receiving generic feedback for all or a lack of constructive comments / formative support.

In terms of assessment, 66.6% of qualitative comments were negative, with some students referring to unclear assignments. However, it is noted that 'criteria used in marking was clear in advance' performed the strongest as an overall NSS measure in the 'assessment and feedback' category. It is noted that (except in 2021) the trend on assessment and feedback is downward from a high of 74% agreement in 2018 to low of 64% in 2022. In 2022 the satisfaction on NSS score for assessment and feedback was below median / in lower quartile, having fallen from 74 to 64 between 2018 and 2022.

The MEQ scores for Autumn 2022 give a very different story, with an 80% positive score for assessment and feedback across the institution, which suggests that CUG and initiatives to improve Assessment and Feedback for students are having an impact. Elected representatives of Your SU have addressed the issue of the bunching of assessment and the quality of feedback with CUG and welcome the commitment to tackling the challenge over the next year.

2.1.3a Case Study – The Pandemic 'No Detriment'

The University introduced a 'no detriment' policy, in spring 2020, to ensure that students were protected if they were the victim of external circumstances beyond their reasonable control whilst preserving fairness, equity, and academic integrity. This policy was introduced in line with wider sector action to help students cope with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It has been noted by CUG that the policy of 'no detriment' has led to a 'change in culture around extensions and deferrals' with Faculties inundated with requests for extensions and deferrals. The University and the Your SU are working together on a Steering Group to reduce the number of extensions and deferrals and on student communications. Your SU student representatives believe that work still needs to be done to develop early interventions to signpost students to the correct support services before they become overwhelmed with pressure. Your SU believes that Student Success Coaches will be a fundamental part of this intervention. It will be interesting to see how this revised plan influences student perceptions of assessment in the 2024 NSS.

2.2 Resources, Support, Quality and Student Engagement

2.2.1 Organisation and Management

The following NSS statements below are grouped around the heading of organisation and management.

- Course is well organised and runs smoothly
- The timetable works efficiently for me
- Course/ teaching changes communicated effectively

Overall, this grouping of questions has seen a decreasing percentage of those that agree with the above statements, falling from 80% in 2018 to 72.1% 2022. In particular, performance has significantly declined in HLS from 81.9% in 2018 to 65% in 2022 driven by low scores in the School of Health. It is likely that the fallout from the pandemic is still impacting students in the organisation of their course and work-based placements.

Timetabling

The greatest proportion of negative comments concern timetabling, Timetabling issues are focussed on classes occurring into the evening, late notice of timetable changes (with students commenting that 'the changing timetable affects my responsibilities'), and that CUG can be 'very slow in providing a timetable'.

Student Representation survey feedback (from November 2021) reinforce these sentiments. Students commented on the late release of timetables, the number of changes that occur and the subsequent changes happening once timetables are released. In terms of qualitative comments, the most common theme was also timetabling. An element to note is that PGT students responded most positively by some margin (at 71%) when asked 'my timetable has been communicated effectively'.

It is also noted that there is a positive response to timetabling at the CU Group locations. As teaching is based on a block system, the predictable nature of the timetabling would appear to be a positive advantage. Conversely, timetabling is scored lower by students in HLS, an area of study that is perhaps less linear and significantly placement based, with the likelihood of more students with caring responsibilities who rely on more structure.

Enrolment

In addition to timetabling, Your SU has also received significant negative feedback (through the Student Rep system and the Advice Service) over the past two years around the challenges of students being able to enrol in a timely fashion. It is believed that the volume of applicants has been hard to manage, and staffing issues have compounded the problem. This has been of concern to elected representatives. For some, the journey to completion of enrolment has not been clear, there have been differences in experiences between new starters and returners (some of whom have felt like an afterthought). This affected domestic students who have not been able to access SFE funding and for all where they have not been able to access online materials / teaching some way into the course. Your SU also recorded an increase in the number of emergency supermarket shopping vouchers it had to issue to those experiencing funding delays. This has risked onward progression as well the ability for students to form class relationships. Writing in January 2022, it is noted that enrolment performance has improved so far, and Your SU have received noticeably less student feedback as CUG systems have improved.

2.2.2 Academic Support for Students

Using NSS 2022 data, the grouping of 'Academic Support' scores above the sector median however, the weakest area of scoring concerns students being 'able to contact staff when they need to'. This has also been a theme emerging from Student Rep feedback. Three locations are 'below median', with HLS again performing with the lowest percentage. In terms of the 'Academic Personal Tutoring' system the picture is balanced with positive comments such as 'tutoring being great' but sometimes, response to queries is seen as slow.

Academic support systems, notably math/statistics support through SIGMA and CAW, are viewed positively by students and contribute to understanding and learning. One student noted that 'CAW has been great in helping me make the most out of my coursework'.

Student Representation survey feedback (from 2020) demonstrated an overwhelmingly positive response to knowing 'where to find academic support if I need it'. The strongest positive responses came from students at stages two and three and lowest, predictably, at stage one. The most recognised support services were the library, IT services and CAW.

One comment suggested that 'an email could go out which highlighted all the services students might need depending on what stage they are at in the student journey'. Your SU is currently working with CUG on a major project to better connect student communication with the student journey.

2.2.3 Course Quality Reviews

The University has several mechanisms that progress course quality. Courses Quality Enhancement Monitoring (CQEM) is an annual third-semester review process which all courses complete. The review considers what courses need to achieve strategically in line with learning outcomes, employability goals and QAA regulatory standards. Your SU is a part of this process. Your SU also recognises course quality through the student-led 'I Love my Course' campaigns, and teaching is praised through the 'I Love my Staff' campaigns.

CUG also uses the 'Enhanced Support and Action Planning' (ESAP) mechanism to focus on courses with low student satisfaction scores. Additional support is given to identified courses to help to improve the student experience. Your SU has been involved in this support, with additional opportunities provided for students to give feedback outside of standard student voice meetings. The ESAP process considers improvements strategically over a period of three years.

2.2.4 'The Curriculum Transformation Project'

The Curriculum Transformation Project, in which Your SU has been a participant, is launching in September 2023. The project aims to review and reapprove virtually all undergraduate courses.

The project will include 'the rationalisation of module choice' and the introduction of a 'common first year'. Some may reflect that this is limiting choice and the ability to specialise, however, (as the university assert) it may lead to a more coherent student experience regarding 'timetabling'. It will also mean that there is additional timetabled time for students to receive academic support through a 'course hour'. Your SU see the opportunity for further development of 'academic societies' engaging through the Course Hour, something the University has been open-minded about.

2.2.5 Learning Resources – VLE and Library

AULA

The AULA Virtual Learning Environment platform was introduced to CUG in 2019 therefore, the student body were still becoming familiar with it when the pandemic hit. The NSS 22 survey identified more negative than positive comments about AULA, with these being centred on access issues. There was some initial mixed feedback about staff members ability to use Aula. It was a source of frustration and confusion when academic staff were not using the platform correctly or consistently.

“Some staff are really trying hard to facilitate online teaching, whereas others seem uninterested.”

Students noted the benefits of accessing all their learning content and resources online in one place. A student commented that *“I’m loving it so far. The new website, aula is easy to use. I’m able to access all my course material and ask questions on the feed.”*

Aula is used across the group and has now become more embedded. Autumn 22 MEQ data indicates ‘online environments’ as having the joint highest area of satisfaction across CUG

The Library

The library resource scored positively organisation-wide in the autumn 22 MEQ survey with an 88% satisfaction rate. Students have praised it for its calm atmosphere and its resources.

2.2.6 Staff Development and Training

Staff are required to be observed by a senior member of staff and have peer observation. All staff are required to pass an Advance HE accredited postgraduate qualification within two years of joining.

Reflecting on some of the reporting in this paper, Your SU would urge continued focus on the formation and variety of assessment methods, the quality of feedback and the understanding of the student demographic. Coventry University has a fantastically diverse and international student demographic. It gives the opportunities for students to learn from each other and become global citizens. Your SU would like to see that global perspective increasingly reflected in the course materials used.

CASE Study: BAME Attainment Research

Referring again to the research study undertaken by the SU into the BAME student experience at Coventry University, students discussed the importance of building relationships with academic staff to address potential cultural barriers that impact their learning. A common theme among participants was the importance of clear feedback and the ability to be able to talk with lecturers directly about their experience. Participants often felt they could not approach some lecturers due to perceptions of cultural barriers and feeling unheard.

“I think every now and then maybe our lecturers or course leaders should have a one-to-one discussion with the [international] students. Like ‘how’s your experience’ ‘Do you find it difficult’ ‘Do you understand what I’m talking about in the lectures. Yeah, I think that’s something lecturers can do”

2.2.7 Student Support

Not every student’s University journey is simple, and there may be circumstances that disadvantage them right from the beginning of the journey. One area of concern is where students face hardship.

The University Support Fund is available to students enrolled on a course at any CUG campus who are experiencing financial difficulty or have an unexpected emergency to deal with and need assistance with living costs. Students apply through an application, providing evidence of their circumstances. Applications are then reviewed by CUG with the approval and award amount decided in negotiation with Your SU.

2.27a Case Study – Digital Poverty During the Pandemic

Your SUs' 'Covid Student Feedback report' identified the issues students had with digital poverty. Almost two thirds of students who responded to a survey ran by Your SU in November 2020 identified that they had been impacted by digital poverty in some way. The most common issue students faced was poor and unreliable internet connection closely followed by lack of access to suitable study space. Some students had difficulty accessing the software they need as well as the demands online learning placed on hardware and bandwidth.

“Struggling with running engineering software from home. Hardware requirements are too high, now I need to invest in a new PC. Would prefer if ...we can use less demanding software at home”

Your SU and CUG worked together to source and distribute laptops to students who do not have access to a laptop or tablet. This extended across the country with equipment being couriered. This led to Your SU and CUG working to improve the communication around the support that was available. Detailed below is an example of how the scheme worked positively. This demonstrates how CUG can work together with Your SU to modify / improve student support as circumstances demand.

Issue – Student was experiencing financial difficulty, making it difficult to travel to campus, so their ability to access on-campus resources was limited. They had been borrowing laptops from friends at the University which was becoming increasingly difficult as deadlines approached, and this had already impacted on one of their assessments which they had failed due to not having a laptop.

Outcome – Student was provided with a laptop for 4 weeks, supported financially and successfully completed their University course which they wouldn't be able to do without the laptop.

2.2.8 The Student Voice

Students are represented through Your SU elected officers on all significant committees of CUG including Board of Governors and Academic Board. The Officers meet with the Vice Chancellor every six weeks and have a positive relationship with the Senior Leadership Team. The relationship is one of being able to 'pick up the phone' as well as progressing issues through the committee structures.

Coventry University Group have consistently supported the Student Representation system from the Senior Leadership down. There have never been any attempts to interfere or subvert processes and the University has been active in their engagement.

3. Student Outcomes

Based on OFS figures for 2022, Your SU notes that CUG has a 'continuation rate' that exceeds the benchmark of 80% for full-time and part-time students. This is also the case for under / post graduate apprenticeships. There are varying thresholds that measure completion of a course, but again different variations of courses available exceed the benchmark rate and in some cases, by some way. The threshold for part time UG students' completion is much lower (at 40%) than for full-time UG students (75%), but the figure of completion is bettered significantly above the threshold. In terms of progression into skilled employment, further study, or other positive outcomes, OFS data indicates that CUG is meeting and, in some cases exceeding its set thresholds.

CUG has invested in varying mechanisms to help students succeed in and progress beyond their studies which are listed below. This shows that CUG is investing in the student journey and is committed to improving student outcomes.

3.1.1 The Talent Team

The Talent Team was created in April 2020 and brings together all activities related to support, career development and advice, employer engagement, and core skills development into one central unit. There are both central and Faculty based staff, and there is also support for students in the CU Group and CULC. It offers 'specialist support up to 36 months from graduation'. There has been a positive response to the Talent Team through the NSS with comments including 'The Talent Team are fantastic', and there are examples of where students have positive outcomes in their chosen career through opportunities the Talent Team secured.

3.1.2 The Add+vantage Scheme

The scheme is a credit-bearing module that UG students take annually at Coventry University and teaches a 'range of work experience and career development activities'. There are mixed opinions regarding the Add+vantage scheme. NSS (2022) comments show that some students feel that it is unfair that it is mandatory to take these modules that, perhaps, have very little relevance to their degree. There are also comments on the quality of some modules. Others may reflect that the modules give students a chance to develop new skills away from their core discipline and open up new potential career paths. CUG have taken the decision to phase out Add+Vantage modules from September 2023 as Enhancing Futures develops.

3.1.3 Global Mobility Team

The pandemic has had an impact on the work of the Global Mobility Team at Coventry University. The Team has offered several activities for students to broaden their global skills, including international placements, language development and engagement in the Global Leaders programme. It is noted that c.5600 students were enabled to travel, work and study globally in 2017/18, but the pandemic has since influenced these numbers.

One significant aspect that the team had to offer was the generous grant provision of £200 to enable individual students to have a global experience, provided there was an academic element to the trip. This funding has been replaced by offering students digital experiences and access to Turing Fund opportunities; however, it will be disappointing to many students that they may have fewer opportunities for funded international trips.

3.1.4 Enhancing Futures

Enhancing Futures is a set of employability and skills development activities that has run for students at Coventry University and Coventry University London. It has so far run during the third semester with volunteering, work experience and skills sessions running daily.

Your SU is looking forward to seeing the scheme develop and for it to offer students the opportunity to take part in semesters one and two, noting the multiple start points in the academic year. Students from across the whole university group (especially those from a widening participation background) could benefit from its opportunities as well.

3.1.5 Graduate Attributes Framework

CUG has identified a set of skills and attributes that they encourage students to acquire and develop. The aim of these attributes is to specify for students and employers the attributes, characteristics, skills and abilities that CUG students will acquire on the completion of their course.

The new attributes (launching in 2023) will be harmonised with CQEM processes and will become embedded in modules and extra-curricular activity with the intention that students can identify the journey of the development of their skills

3.1.6 Success Coaches

Success coaches were introduced at the end of 2021 across CUG. The Success Coach team is designed to provide individualised support to students, enabling meaningful support to students that persist over time. They coach students throughout their student journey and work with them to understand their ambitions, defining these through Success Plans which encapsulate and provide structure to their goals. The Success Plans cover, Managing Studies, Access to Services, Skills Development, Experience and Peer Mentoring.

Your SU are looking forward to receiving feedback and data on the student experience of the Success Coaches. Your SU are interested in the impact of the system, student satisfaction, the effect on continuation and the areas where it can continue to work together for the benefit of students.

Conclusion

CUG has a complex and growing structure, with students able to access courses across many campuses and modes with multiple entry points and delivery methods. This complexity means that ensuring a consistent and excellent student experience is challenging. To achieve this, CUG develop many initiatives to improve student experiences and outcomes. The submission above shows that these initiatives are wide-ranging and innovative. Your SU monitors the impact of these across the group to ensure these are positive at an individual level as student numbers increase.

Your SU acknowledges that primarily for most students across CUG the experience is a very positive one. There are areas for development in terms of assessment and feedback as well as elements of organisational infrastructure (particularly timetabling and enrolment). Students want to attend but can be frustrated when mechanisms seem to prevent them from doing so. Your SU note that where there are elements for development (including the areas mentioned above), they are addressed actively, and Your SU is engaged and listened to in the conversations.

Your SU is very pleased that the latest data from students (Autumn 2022 MEQs) shows improvements in all the more negative areas, and we are particularly heartened that the enrolment experience in January 2023 is positive for students. CUG is committed to continually monitoring and improving the experience across the student journey.

Your SU's relationship with CUG is a positive one, and we are keen to continue working together to enable the continued positive and high-quality experience for our members.