

Section 1 - Approach to evidence gathering

I am writing from the position of a student representative as the 2022-23 President of the Arts University Bournemouth Students' Union (AUBSU).

With regards to the data, the TEF benchmarks were used in conjunction with the National Student Survey (NSS) results. In addition to this a variety of internal surveys conducted both by the university and AUBSU, namely the annual Student Perception Survey (SPS), Anti-Racism Report (2021), Big Student Check-in (2022), and 2022-23 International Student Report (2023). This is supplemented by several focus groups and informal conversations with students, primarily from course representatives and members of the executive committee for the AUBSU. This student submission covers both the student experience and student outcomes, although due to the data gaps in alumni, it will largely be about the former.

With those caveats in mind, onwards!

Section 2 - Student experience

Full-time undergraduate degrees are structured as follows: Level 4 is the first year where students get to experiment in their chosen field of study, learn technical elements relevant to the next two years like drawing. The second year, Level 5, expands on this and begins to incorporate specific briefs with practical purposes while still allowing a level of flexibility where grades start to be counted toward their final degree. Level 6 is the final year, where teaching skews towards preparing students for industry work and the final major project that's determined by students through a degree of pitching with some guidance from tutors. That project, depending on the course, may be undertaken individually or in groups. All three years require some level of writing as well, either through the Learning Agreements where students can set their own objectives, essays and critical evaluations, with Level 6 taking the brunt of it with the dissertation unit.

Independence is generally encouraged from students. Self-directed study through studio practice or free days where no lectures or workshops are scheduled is peppered throughout calendars. Level 4 students have some level of difficulty with this, with many coming from a secondary school education that tends towards more structured learning, countered by the year not counting towards the final marks and encouragement towards playing with concepts. There is a general expectation to "learn through doing". Briefs for units tend to be broad enough to allow for students to interpret it how they wish to apply it to their practice. There are even a number of students that embody this mentality go an extra mile and attend or even run a few extracurricular activities through clubs and societies and or run as executive officers for the AUBSU.

Learning environments are largely supportive of students across AUB. Contact time with the tutors is regularly administered through workshops that involve practical exercises. Then there are tutorials with full-time staff and visiting tutors (who tend to be working in industry or have had in the past) that are either scheduled or sign-up based. These act as periodic check-ins for projects, which are also done through critique groups where students can give feedback on each other's work. Students tend to find the scheduled mandatory tutorials in

the middle of the term the most useful as it can redirect focus and motivate them. Flexibility for disabled students or students with mental health issues is variable though, as if they miss tutorials, tutors often have no time to catch up afterwards- especially in a larger course.

Students have found the adjustment to relying heavier on virtual learning environments (VLE) difficult in the early years of implementation. It was a welcome addition despite that, if not a complete replacement for in-person teaching. Students enjoyed the archive of recorded lectures and guest speaker talks as a bonus from the online era. The combination of the main hub, myAUB, Canvas and any calendars given to the students outside of the VLE's have made it confusing for some students to keep up with, leading to dissatisfaction with course organisation. COVID-19's presence and impact should always be considered to understand the abrupt shifting between having face-to-face contact hours and losing it has been challenging for staff and students.

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and Study Skills tutors are available through Student Services, in 1:1 support and in large groups. Both are well-appreciated by the students that use them, and for the latter, around 1200-1300 students have accessed it over 2020-2022. The demographics of international students to home students for EAP covers what is to be expected of the student body, the former group being particularly pleased with the support. Extensions (two available per year) and mitigations are available for students, although encouragement to apply from tutors and general student awareness seems to vary by courses, and some do not get their requests approved. Disabled students tend to access these due to health reasons and having that extra week or two seems to be helpful in refining a project to its fullest standard. It should be noted that students with some form of neurodiversity make up a notable population at AUB- the exact figure is nebulous with many not having disclosed this or not having been diagnosed yet. With many only having discovered so at their time in university or having lost or moved away from their support networks, it makes it all the more apparent in impacting their studies. This is further supported by the 54% of the students that said problems with their health affected their studies and 32% that said issues at home had an impact (AUBSU, 2022). 62% also reported that they were in some form of employment throughout their degree, seemingly in correlation with the other issues. Those issues (mental health, finance, issues at home) that continue to plague students' ability to access support for education exist somewhat separate to the quality of the course. It is worth discussing how cost of living and disability (particularly for international students and low-income students) support ties into reports of difficulty coping with workload. The elephant in the room of COVID-19 must be addressed here as well, with the satisfaction rate for academic support waning in the years since, actively impacting scores for Q15 "The course is well organised and running smoothly" of the NSS as well.

Most students are concerned with doing well, this is particularly shown by the level of engagement that goes into final major projects. Many courses like those of BA (Hons) Events Management and BA (Hons) Film require students to fundraise as part of the degree, and students are typically out and about setting up bake sales and so on. Criteria and marking stay as a point of contention between students and tutors. Feedback on the "notched marking scheme" is varied (students receive a mark that ends with 2, 5 or 8 in powers of 10), although most tend to have an instinctive understanding by the end of their three years with many of the complaints coming from Level 4 students. The frustration

perhaps comes from the new changes in marking in GCSEs and A-Levels¹. Marking tends to be delivered back at a reasonable time bar extenuating circumstances for staff. There are processes where students can challenge grades through appeals as well, with obviously varying degrees of success depending on requests.

The AUBSU employs volunteers from all year groups in each degree as course representatives, existing as the go-between for the students and tutors. The current structure consists of said volunteers collecting feedback from students, taking them to the tutors in informal discussions or the more structured course partnership group (CPG) meetings. Across the board on datasets drawn on for this report, student voice is generally viewed to be good (consistently being above benchmark aside from Level 4), the Big Student Check-in (AUBSU, 2022) shows that the Student's Union ranks the highest in being well-represented to the students. Feedback is generally well received by tutors and is enacted upon quickly, although some miscommunication exists when returning that feedback to students- hence the score ranging from 60-63% on the SPS and 48.93% on the NSS as of recent years (Student Perception Survey, 2021; 2022). The AUBSU, staff availability willing, work to follow up on changes.

The university has made efforts in diversifying the curriculum in recent years following the release of the Anti-Racism report by the sabbatical officers from 2020-21 that looked over ethnicity profiles of the student body and staff, the BAME attainment gap that was 3% higher than sector average and continues to be so, as well as the lived experiences of students (AUBSU, 2021). A team dedicated to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) has been assembled since then, amongst other recommendations. Any issues arising from the curriculum have typically been raised by the students themselves to the tutors who then speak to the EDI group and the AUBSU to come up with solutions to improve transparency and student welfare.

The library resources, industry-relevant machines and spaces like the print room and rendering farms are abundant, alongside full subscriptions to the Adobe Creative Cloud suite. High quality equipment is available through the SiSo booking system, allowing students to become familiar with what they might come across in the future. It should be stated that many degrees do require students to purchase their own materials or pay a studio fee, say in BA (Hons) Fashion or BA (Hons) Makeup, which continues to be a point of contention for students especially in the current economic climate. Students are generally satisfied with these provisions, and it appears to be one of the draws to AUB. Some students find it frustrating that some items are restricted by course, although upon request and subsequent induction they may be granted access depending on technician availability. There is a regular conversation about increasing space due to capacity increasing each year (note the student population having grown to 4,216 individuals as of the 2022-23 academic year). A few courses allow for a whole personal desk for studio space while others have more communal spaces. Construction of larger spaces, for places like the Northlight building (housing BA and MA Fine Art) is being worked on- although will not be completed within the scope of the current cohort's time at AUB.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/exams-and-assessments-in-2021>

Several courses bring on guest speakers that range from industry professionals to academics both internal and external to the university. Opportunities to attend screenings, exhibits and galleries onsite and trips to any off site (including international ones) are provided depending on courses. To no surprise, students enjoy this, seeing as it gives them a glimpse into applying their practice beyond the university level.

Section 3 - Student outcome

The continuation indication value for students with their first degree with an integrated foundation year is 96.5% materially above benchmark, owing to the success of the Foundation Diploma in Art, Design and Media that guarantees you a spot in a BA degree afterwards. The overall satisfaction rate continues to hover around the 80% mark for Foundation, and despite the drop in enrolment most students are still content with the teaching.

Continuation and completion rates, and the above benchmark ones at AUB, seem to be due to how practical applications to prepare for industry are built upon until Level 6 and beyond. An uptick in the satisfaction rate for the 2022 SPS, going up from 83% to 92% is telling- the 2022 cohort were the first to have a summer show and graduate shows were starting to be in-person again (Student Perception Survey, 2022). Students take pride in being able to display months of hard work, especially when it feeds back into their careers as well. Many degrees go out to London shows like New Designers, or screen films at the BFI. It should be noted that the NSS results reflect the dip in satisfaction more than the rise. Level 6 is also utilised to strengthen student's portfolio, giving them the time that they might not have post-graduation. Client based work is either integrated into the curriculum or is encouraged as a side project that is sometimes granted time outside of main modules. As mentioned previously, independent research into open calls for briefs, competitions and internships are encouraged and students are allowed to bring what they feel is necessary to adding to their artistic practice. Typically courses have some level of funding to support this. In addition to this, Level 6 includes units that engage with professional practice to simulate being in industry like in BA (Hons) Animation, e.g. creating portfolio pieces and curating them on websites or slides.

Outside of the degree, support for careers is provided by the AUB Futures department. The annual careers fairs and events, spanning lectures and workshops, are generally well attended by students even beyond the graduating cohort. The 2021-22 fair included local or geographically relevant businesses like Teemill, Outpost VFX, portfolio review sign-ups, and socials. JobTeaser and AUB& exist as platforms to collect opportunities for all students, with the latter being a burgeoning site that targets alumni to create a network and seek advice from industry professionals, similar to that of LinkedIn. Currently, AUB& is newly implemented and not that many graduates have engaged with it as of yet, but support for it is growing. Careers drop-in sessions are offered, where students can have a one-to-one session with a staff member who will help them with a variety of topics from part time work during one's studies to career guidance for further study. For a general idea of attendance, a total of ~367 students attended these between 2021-2022 (AUB Futures, 2022), with a demographic spread of ethnicity and gender that reflect those of the university in general. International students in particular have given feedback about the difficulty of finding employment post-graduation and needing more support there, although the university is

starting to hold sessions geared towards graduate visa routes (International Student Report, 2023).

Knowing the quality of teaching that the university provides hit the right demographic, why then the 6.1% difference in benchmark for progression? Evaluating gains for students post-graduation into employment and further study is something that requires nuance. Alumni more often than not will enter freelance work or employment outside of their trade to continue creative practices on the side due to the difficulty in entering the creative industry of their studies. At the end of the day, with university acting as the connective tissue between students from secondary education to further studies or employment- AUB strives to prepare its students by equipping them with practical skills in their trade and as individuals through teaching. This is informed through the way it structures the three year degree, the materials provided to pave the way for innovation in art, and the way students respond to it with the independence that was taught to them by the institution they study under, which should indelibly be a part of its ethos.

References

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