Student Submission for University of East Anglia

1. Approach to evidence-gathering

This report has been written by UEA's Students' Union (uea(su)), authored by the elected Undergraduate Education Officer, with staff support from all departments and elected officers. UEA Students' Union is the recognised representative body of UEA as constituted by our Articles of Association and the Education Act 1994. All the executive, legislative and scrutiny bodies of uea(su) are aware of the content of this submission and had an opportunity to contribute. We collated views through a range of methods including surveys, focus groups and consultation with representative committees within uea(su).

The highest legislative body of the SU, Union Council, fed into the data collection work through surveys and received a presentation on the content of this report in November 2022. Union Council is a representative voting body made up of up to 300 elected students from across sports clubs, societies, liberation & peer support groups, schools, and faculties. Education Committee is a delegated sub-committee of Union Council which provided a crucial scrutiny function, ensuring the views of all academic representatives were heard in the production of this report. The Student Officer Committee (SOC) is a smaller group of student leaders, some of whom were elected in either cross-campus ballots or from within a defined membership, which provides extra representative weight for marginalised student groups (such as black students, disabled students, and LGBT+ students). SOC provided a vital role in analysing the feedback from the perspective of underrepresented groups, which provided more depth to the feedback generated from the broader surveying work and signed off on the report before submission. We have confidence this report is reflective and representative of student views across the University and considers the views of students from marginalised or underrepresented backgrounds, whom we believe are more likely to have a different experience of teaching and learning at the University of East Anglia.

Throughout this process, we have worked closely with the university on both this report as well as the university's. Full-time elected Officers and members of SU staff have been included in UEA's TEF Working Group. We've had access to UEA's data through these meetings and had the opportunity to ask for different data sources. We note the university's transparency in providing this data to us whilst also navigating some difficulty around the lack of a data-sharing agreement between our two organisations. We thank UEA for providing this to us as it has strengthened this report throughout. We shared an early draft of this report with UEA and received a copy of the provider submission. UEA supported us after this on specific areas, such as educational gain, to make sure where we draw upon their data that we are accurate in our descriptions and provided more where needed. Clear boundaries and intentions have been shared with and followed by UEA from the beginning of this process. We do not feel that any undue influence has been had on this submission and this report is independent of the University. We have covered the same courses as the university, which does not include apprenticeships in their report.

In November we launched our "TEF Survey" in partnership with Alterline[i]. This was an online survey that was open for 2 weeks. We received 348 responses, of which 71 were postgraduates and these were removed from further analysis. We saw a relatively even

split across all 4 faculties, with only FMH being slightly lower at 16% of respondents. There is a slight weighting towards first-year students at 38% of respondents, as well as a higher proportion of students identifying as Female rather than Male (64% to 30% respectively.) 23% of respondents identified with having a disability and the ethnicity splits are broadly in line with the makeup of the population at UEA. Although the count of respondents is low, there is confidence that this is a representative dataset of the demographics at UEA.

Over our data collection period, we spent several days canvassing students directly in the main social space of our Student Union building. We had a scale question and a category question. For the scale question, students were asked to place a sticker on a line based on how much they agreed with the statement. For the categories question, each student was given a single sticker to place in the category they most agreed with. In this, we asked a range of students from across all years and faculties.

Throughout this submission, we will also draw upon UEA's "Pulse" Survey data from both 2021/22 and 2022/23 for some questions. This survey is conducted across all students at UEA weekly where a different set of questions are asked each week on a range of different topics.

Two focus groups were conducted as part of this research, each made up of a selection of undergraduate students who volunteered. The students who took part studied a range of courses and were from various years of study, including some fourth-year students. The focus groups were facilitated by the Undergraduate Education Officer and participants were informed that their responses though anonymised, could form part of the report. A range of questions was asked covering the areas of student experience and outcomes that could not be as easily captured in the surveying work. More in-depth answers were provided around the subject of teaching and learning. There was an even split of students across all four faculties. There was a diversity of students across the categories of the year group, disability status, age, religion, and race/ethnicity broadly in line with student demographics, but with a weighting towards female students. Participants gave their views openly and willingly and there was no influence from the facilitator or clerk in the meeting. All participant feedback has been anonymised for this report.

2. Summary of findings

Through all the data and interactions collected from the above, this report finds that there are genuine areas of excellence at UEA, for example, the library and the resources it provides. Students value these areas highly but there are inconsistencies in the quality of experience in other areas across schools and faculties. These inconsistencies have a notably higher impact on students from certain demographic groups, particularly disabled students, and this can lead to an impact on Student Outcomes. These problem areas do not apply to every area of teaching and learning and UEA has made several positive commitments to these groups through their Inclusive Education Policy, commitment to the SU's Students of Colour Ambassador scheme in some schools and recent Reasonable Adjustment review. This report finds that while UEA is taking steps in the right direction, the impact and implementation of these commitments are inconsistent and have not been fully realised across all faculties and schools on campus. The problem areas highlighted in this report are leading to an inequitable service for all students across the board; particularly those in underrepresented groups.

3. Student experience

Provider name: University of East Anglia (UEA)

Wanting to feel valued and a part of a community at university is a desire students regularly express. This can fundamentally underpin their experience of teaching and impact student outcomes. Responses to the values set of questions within UEA Pulse from 2021 are shown in Figure 1. The levels of positive responses to feeling respected and being themselves are excellent to see and can set students up to achieve excellence. However, a particularly

Figure 1 shows positive responses to the Values question set. Source: UEA's Pulse Survey

worrying statistic was that only 46% of all students felt UEA "cares about me", which fell even further to 34% for disabled students and remained consistent across the year for this group. This is worrying because not only is this group significantly down on the rest of UEA, but as most students do not feel that UEA cares about them, this may undermine their willingness to seek help or make changes to their degree, ultimately making their experience worse.
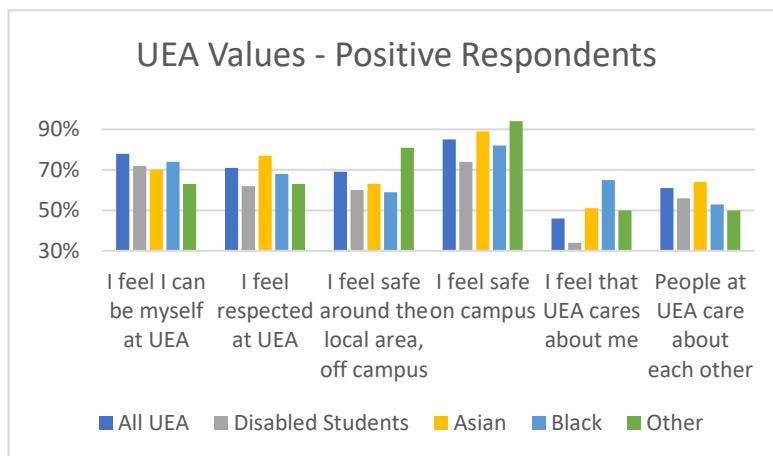
Teaching Effectiveness

When looking at teaching across campus, most students tell a positive story. 64% of students in the TEF Survey agreed with the statement "I am satisfied with the quality of my course" with 79% agreeing with a similar statement in Pulse. This shows a high level of satisfaction across the entire university. However, when looking at this beyond the surface we see the picture of broad inconsistency. The question in pulse had a huge variation in the level of positivity. For example, in the School of Chemistry 91% agreed whereas, in the School of Medicine, only 66% did. This shows that depending on the school of study,

experiences at UEA can be vastly different. This inconsistency of experience is also shown through the use of lecture recordings as shown in Figure 2. This is broadly aligned to different schools and faculties all having different practices and rules around what should or should not be recorded. Students often express a desire for recordings, especially those who are disabled, are carers, or commuter students who may struggle to get to every lecture and so having a recording allows

Figure 2 shows responses to the question on lecture recordings. Source: uea(su) TEF Survey

them to still experience teaching and achieve good outcomes. It is these groups that struggle when this policy is either lacking or inconsistent and closing this gap could lead to these students having a greater sense of value from their education.
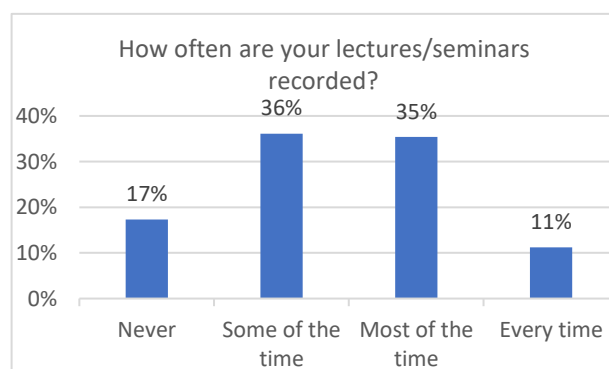
One thing of particular note on teaching was that during a focus group, students discussed the perceived quality of their day-to-day teaching. Several students reflected that, while the content of their teaching is engaging and what they expected from coming to university, some of the ways content is delivered is less than what they expected because of the quality of the delivery. When asked what the biggest issue UEA faces around teaching, students on the whole said it was the quality of the delivery of some of

their modules. Again, this was not in every school and some students disagreed, but this ultimately does show the inconsistency of experience.

The Library and Learning Resources

As noted at the beginning of this report, students often speak very highly of UEA's Library and the resources that it provides. This is consistently shown over a number of years within the NSS and on the TEF Dashboard. In our TEF survey, we asked students what they use the library for and how regularly, as shown in Figure 3.
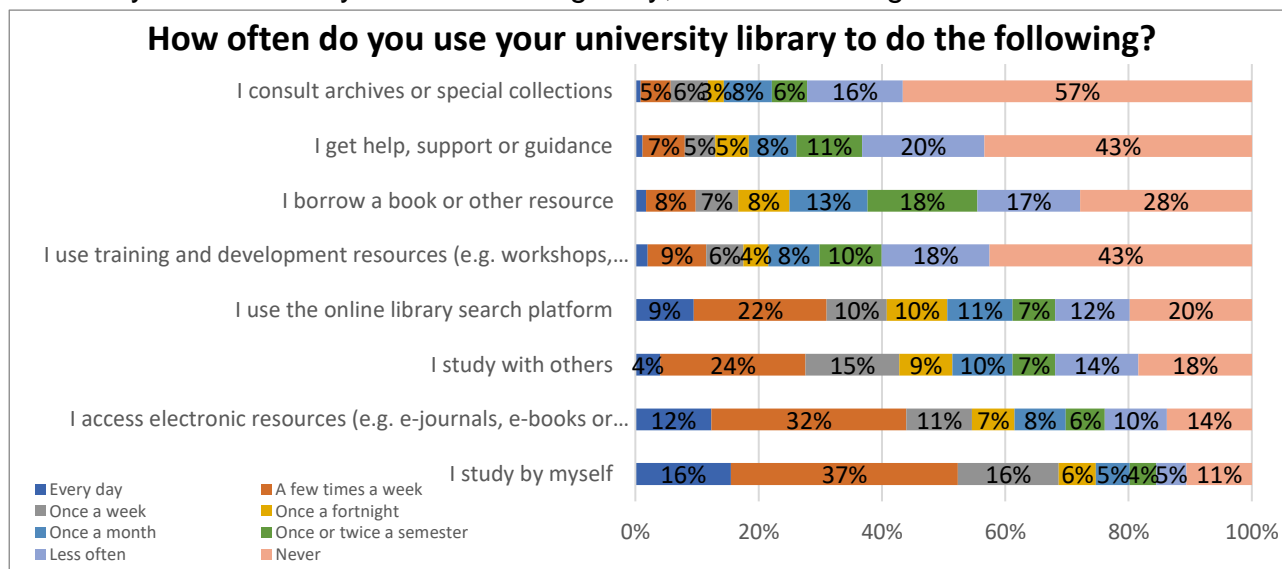
How often do you use your university library to do the following?

	Every day	A few times a week	Once a week	Once a fortnight	Once or twice a semester	Once a month	Less often	Never
I consult archives or special collections	5%	6%	3%	8%	6%		16%	57%
I get help, support or guidance	7%	5%	5%	8%	11%		20%	43%
I borrow a book or other resource	8%	7%	8%	13%	18%		17%	28%
I use training and development resources (e.g. workshops,…	9%	6%	4%	8%	10%		18%	43%
I use the online library search platform	9%	22%	10%	10%	11%	7%	12%	20%
I study with others	4%	24%	15%	9%	10%	7%	14%	18%
I access electronic resources (e.g. e-journals, e-books or…	12%	32%	11%	7%	8%	6%	10%	14%
I study by myself	16%	37%	16%	6%	5%	4%	5%	11%

Figure 3 shows responses to the question "How often do you use your university library to do the following:" – Source uea(su) TEF Survey

As shown, 69% of students use the library to study individually at least once a week if not more often. Students also regularly use it to access electronic resources, with 55% using it at least once a week. This demonstrates that students value what the library provides them and that it supports the teaching and learning that takes place at UEA. Student satisfaction in the library and the resources it provides is consistent across year groups and faculties. Academic reps often express gratefulness to the library in Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs) and other meetings they attend, and this is frequently fed back to Education Committee. The library also often cooperates and works to provide needs that students identify, such as working with the SU on a new Quiet Space for students and supporting the decolonisation work. These aspects also show the value the library provides to students in making their experience as good as possible.

Assessment and Feedback

A key issue for UEA, shown in the TEF dashboard and analysis of NSS data, is Assessments and Feedback. This issue frequently comes up across the entire campus and is not limited to certain schools or faculties and is unfortunately a consistent

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
My work has improved since I started university	10%		26%	45%	14%
The feedback I receive on my work helps me to improve for my next assessment	16%		23%	48%	9%

Figure 4 shows responses to two statements on Assessment and Feedback. Source: uea(su) TEF Survey

problem across campus. Figure 4 shows data from the TEF Survey on this topic. has improved since starting university, and 57% of students agreed with the statement that they found their feedback helpful. This was backed up by the discussions in the focus groups where, when students were asked whether they have seen grades improve
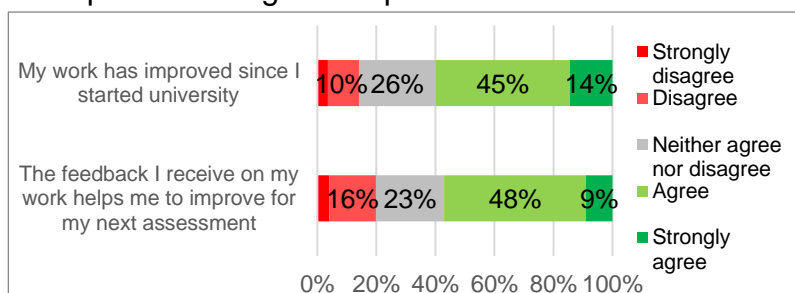
between assessments, some of the students said that their work was not improving and that the quality of feedback was a significant part of that. Students stated that feedback on several courses and modules was not overly personalised, making it difficult for students to reach out to academic staff to learn how to develop their work further. This feedback is closely aligned with feedback received through Education Committee and within Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs). All these points will contribute to the poor experience that students have around assessment and feedback.

Looking at similar questions that were asked in UEA's Pulse Survey where 64% of all students agreed with the statement "Feedback on my work supports my academic development". Fortunately, this is consistent across student demographic groups, although it is still lower for disabled students by around 4%. So, while there isn't a significant drop for certain demographic groups, this is consistently an issue across campus.

Listening to feedback

To make teaching the best experience it can be, student voices should be included at every level of decision-making within the university and uea(su) runs a system of academic representation to allow this. The system is supported by UEA and maintained with a co-agreed Code of Practice. In each school, there are SSLCs in place, which should have academic staff on them to respond to issues raised by students. Notably, the university more concretely supported the recruitment of students for these roles this academic year resulting in the highest number of reps seen before. But this support for recruitment was inconsistent across the university and faculties, particularly in the Sciences which makes that student voice difficult to be heard. Beyond the recruitment of reps, we see significant variation in support for SSLCs across the different schools. In our TEF survey, we asked students to what extent they agreed or disagreed with two statements around feedback, the results of which are shown in Figure 5. This shows another example of inconsistency because, while most students have seen positive changes, a significant number haven't seen any. Similarly, it is concerning that only 57% of students think their feedback would be taken seriously if they raised these views because if
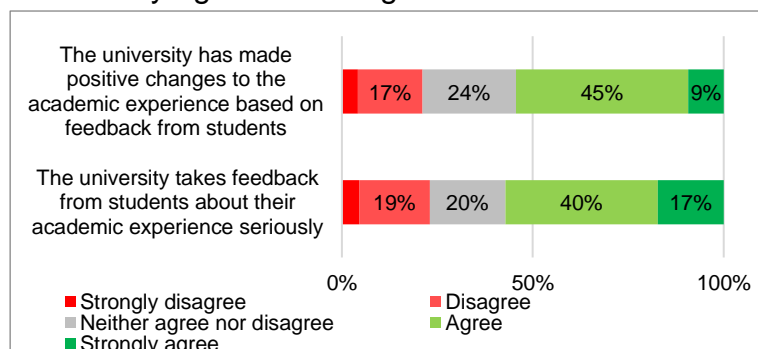

Figure 5 shows responses to the TEF survey statements

they don't think they would be taken seriously, students are unlikely to raise these issues at all. Reassuringly, 81% of students in our TEF survey said that they would know who to go to with a problem on their course, with 55% saying they would go to their lecturer or tutor and 75% saying that they would talk to their Academic Advisors. 33% of students also mention their academic rep or friends from their course.

Academic Advice and Support

A significant issue for students is the support that they get while studying for their degree. As part of our canvassing work, students were asked which of four options they thought UEA needed to improve. 39% of students chose Academic Support. When students were asked what kind of academic support, they felt they needed more of, 40% of students said it related to lecture content. 25% said that they needed more well-being support and 23% said that they need help submitting Extenuating Circumstances and Reasonable Adjustments.

This was reaffirmed when students were asked about support in the focus groups. One thing that particularly surprised us was a conversation that took place where the students all agreed that the quality of both feedback and support entirely depends on the relationship, they have with the academics themselves.   in particular, spoke about how in their experience, their lecturers weren't providing any extra support for those who do not have English as their first language. Several students in the room had had quite a negative experience accessing this support and reflected on how lecturers who are international themselves, often provide more equal feedback and support to all students than those that aren't.

All of this points to the need for a robust academic advising system across UEA and this is one area for UEA that could become excellent. Each student should have a dedicated staff member to go to with academic issues, for example, module choices, as well as signposting for more pastoral care. However, although every student has an academic advisor, the TEF Survey showed 13% had never met them. 33% had only met them once with a further 19% only meeting them twice. All students should meet their advisor at the start of their degrees, making this particularly concerning. In Pulse for

Figure 6 shows responses to how frequently have they met their advisor. Source: uea(su) TEF Survey

2021/22, 59% of students agreed that "my advisor meets with me as frequently as I need" and 57% agreed that "I have a good relationship with my advisor". So, while it's great that most students are being met as frequently as they need, the main concern is whether the remaining 40% of students are receiving the kind of support that they require, particularly if advisors are the most likely place support would be sought by students as shown in the TEF Survey where they were the highest ranked answer to the question "where would you go with a problem on your course?" To have seen such a cry for support and students saying they would use this system alongside the huge variation in times that students have met their advisor, this is particularly worrying.
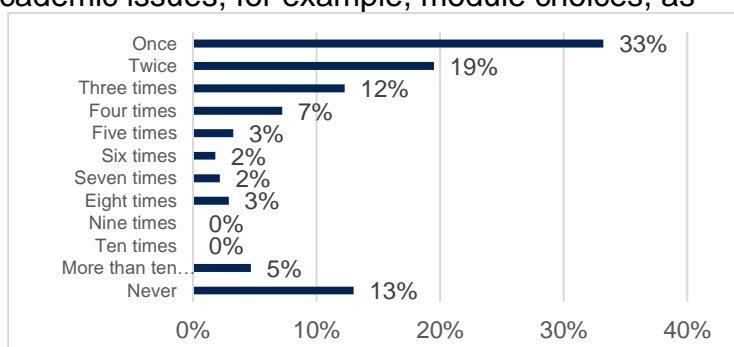
However, there is no difference in positive responses to any of the Pulse questions on advising for Disabled Students and most ethnicities apart from Black students who are marginally lower. On average, students in later stages of their degree responded more positively to the same questions. As such, the largest source of inconsistency is between the different faculties and schools. The first question on whether students feel they have a positive relationship with their advisors has positive response rates ranging from 24% to 74%, although the 24% is an outlier from the School of Politics, Philosophy, Language and Communication Studies (PPL.) When looking at faculties, most are at around 60% positive, however, in the Arts and Humanities (HUM) we see a drop to 43%. This outlier is also caused by PPL.

A change was made by PPL to their advising system, moving away from individual academic advisors to a joint email inbox, a system which students have universally expressed dissatisfaction with. The biggest concern here is the lack of consistency in both the experience for students and in messaging from the university, making it difficult to signpost students to their advisor if in some schools they don't exist. A robust academic advisor system has the potential to be a strength for UEA as it can make a significant difference to students' experiences, and this is expressed a lot by students. They see real

value in this system when it works but the concern is that UEA may not be putting appropriate training and support in place for academics to fulfil this role, as well as generally not providing a strong enough steer on how systems should work that means it's not completely fit for purpose due to these inconsistencies.

4. Student Outcomes

There has been a shift in the university's approach to student outcomes and success in the last two years with more recognition of how a holistic approach contributes to overall wellbeing and achieving good outcomes. There has been a commitment at senior levels of the university to inclusive education but feedback from students is that practice on the ground can be less consistent. A more joined-up approach between senior management and academics would potentially result in more consistency and a better overall experience, resulting in better outcomes, for students.

Student Success and Progression

The TEF survey showed that most students feel confident that UEA is supporting them to succeed and progress beyond their studies, with 73% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that UEA is preparing them for their future careers. Comparing this feedback to data from UEA's careers service, students on professional courses in FMH (24.8%) were most likely to be applying for roles. Whilst students in HUM (11.8%) were far less likely to be applying for roles, 52.7% of the HUM cohort engaged with Careers Central. There were similarly high levels of engagement from students in SSF (60.7%) and SCI (61.2%).

Responses from the TEF survey about students feeling more generally ready for life after university was less positive with only 37% of students feeling prepared. Although there was a higher proportion of first-year responses to the survey and this may partly explain this sense of a lack of preparedness. When asked if UEA was providing them with the right support to make the transition to life after university only 47% agreed suggesting there is room for improvement in this area. Confidence is a key component of feeling ready for the transition from university into employment or further study and 69% of students agreed that UEA has had a slightly to very positive impact on their personal confidence and self-esteem. There is however a significant group of students (29%) who feel that their time at UEA has negatively impacted their mental health and wellbeing, which could potentially limit their ability to succeed and progress beyond their studies at least in the short term. Some students who are struggling with their mental health are likely to crossover with those groups of students who identify as having a disability and therefore supporting student mental health should be a priority alongside accessibility when it comes to improving outcomes for students with disabilities, particularly around completion.

Another potential barrier to success and progression is a poor sense of belonging, which continues to be an issue for several students. 11% of students surveyed feel no connection to other students on their course, 14% to their housemates and 18% of students to their lecturers. The more holistic approach being developed by UEA will hopefully result in a greater sense of belonging and will better support student mental health leading to more students feeling confident about the transition to living and working independently. Over the past four years there has been significant investment in direct

mental health and wellbeing support services at the university and going forward UEA's work on the Student Minds Mental Health Charter will hopefully result in mental health awareness being embedded by design.

Continuation and completion

From the Student Outcomes data in the TEF dashboard, there is confidence that UEA is achieving good continuation and completion rates. For first-degree and other UG students, these rates are higher than the benchmark but, there are gaps between different demographics Asian students have the highest rate of completion (93.8%), whilst White students (92.6%) are more likely to complete their degree compared to Black students (90.6%), and students who identify as having 'Mixed' ethnicity (89.5%). Students under 21 (94.7%) are more likely to complete than mature students with students aged 21-30 (88.2%) and students aged 31 and over (83.5%), similarly, students aged 21-30 are also less likely to continue with their course. We expect that a robust and clearly communicated policy on blended learning, specifically around recorded lectures and online learning, could help improve outcomes for mature students, particularly those with families or other commitments. Students over 21 are more likely to progress than their younger counterparts, which potentially reflects the likelihood of previous work experience or mature students who may be going to university with a particular career outcome in mind.

However, some concerns remain about the attainment gap evidence in the OFS APP Dashboard shows that attainment or awarding gaps between White and Black students have not significantly improved since 2016-17. The gap between White and Black students is currently 14% and this is 9-10% higher than the gap between White students and all other ethnic groups. Officers from the SU have been on the Vice-Chancellors Taskforce on Tackling Racism for the past 2 years and there is a strategic commitment from the Vice-Chancellor to reducing inequalities between students and making the campus more equitable, however, this is not backed up by the financial resource and staff time to deliver on projects and enable whole institutional change to happen, as with other projects relating to the student experience as mentioned previously in this report.

One area of particular interest is the outcomes and experiences of students with disabilities. The OFS APP data dashboard shows that the number of students reporting a disability has increased from 15.1% to 21.7% over the past four years. There is an evolving picture over the four years of changing outcomes for students with disabilities, with a 1.2% gap in attainment in 2017-18 between students who reported disabilities and those who didn't. In 2018-19 that gap increased to 3% but, in 2019-20 that gap improved to 2% suggesting there were some benefits to online learning for students with disabilities. In 2020-21 the attainment gaps were reversed and 94% of students with disabilities achieved a good degree award compared to 91.7% of students without. This is a positive development, and it might be a result of more hybrid teaching and improvements to reasonable adjustment processes benefiting students with disabilities. Whilst attainment may be improving for students with disabilities, they are still 4% less likely to complete their degree than students without a disability. The hope is that the upcoming blended learning policy will provide a coherent approach to embedding these benefits and increase consistency.

Progression to skilled employment, further study or other positive outcomes

Provider name: University of East Anglia (UEA)

The SU does not collect data on progression and student outcomes, so it's difficult to comment on this. However, students fed back about their future career plans as a measure of confidence about their progression. The TEF Survey showed 29% of students have a career plan in mind and intend to gain relevant work experience whilst completing their course, with another 20% of students having some ideas about their career and are ready to start planning. Considering respondents were slightly weighted towards first years, it is positive to see approximately half of the students feeling confident about their future career plans. Of those who were less confident 13% felt that they knew what they wanted to do but were not sure how to get there and another 9% had no ideas yet but wanted to start thinking about their future career options. For those students who are less clear about what they want to do or how to achieve their career goals, good quality career advice is essential. Data provided by UEA's careers service shows gaps in confidence between students from some widening participation (WP) groups and students who are not from WP backgrounds. For example, students with disabilities are 6% less likely to feel confident in articulating their skills to employers than other groups of students. Similarly, students from racialised backgrounds are 3.4% less likely to feel confident compared to their White counterparts but they are more likely to engage with the full range of careers service activities. Students with disabilities are 2% less likely to attend events than students without disabilities but 3% more likely to attend a one-to-one appointment and 2% more likely to use the service's website. Progression rates for Black students (86.5%) are excellent compared to White students (75%) and all other ethnic groups. Given the fact that Black students feel less confident in articulating their skills, it's not clear if this relates to their school or course, such as if they are on professional or vocational courses in FMH.

Educational Gain

UEA uses an approach to Educational Gain aligned with cognitive gain based on student marks and defines it as the comparison between the end of year one mark and the final mark as a percentage. However, it is not clear how this measure compares with the sector. UEA's data highlights differences in educational gain between student groups from different demographics showing that White students have a 0.1% greater educational gain than students from BME backgrounds. However, grouping together students from all non-White ethnicities masks inequity between different ethnic groups. It's clear that the attainment or awarding gap between Black students and White students is far greater than the gaps between White students and other ethnic groups and Asian students have the highest completion rates of all students. So, it's difficult to conclude that a 0.1% gap is representative of the reality for some ethnic groups. In addition, whilst there is data on the split between male and female students, a move towards capturing data on educational gain for non-binary and trans students would be recommended to understand their experiences. Students with a disability have a 0.15% greater gain than students with no disability but it's not clear if there is any relationship here between students being diagnosed with a disability at university and receiving support that they hadn't previously accessed. More significant and concerning are the gaps in educational gain highlighted between students under 21, who have a much greater educational gain at 2.87% than students over 21 at 0.21%. Further work should be done to understand the factors driving these differences and to see what can be done to mitigate this.

Whilst UEA's definition focuses solely on academic outcomes, the TEF survey asked students about the skills they were developing at university. Most students agreed that

Provider name: University of East Anglia (UEA)

UEA had helped them develop a range of skills. The main areas where some students felt that their time at UEA had reduced or negatively impacted their skills were confidence (9%), time management (9%) and networking (6%). Those students who felt that their confidence and networking ability had been negatively impacted or underdeveloped may also be some of the same students who reported a negative impact on their mental health and/or feeling a lack of connection to their coursemates, housemates and lecturers. These skills directly relate to a student's ability to connect and interact with others and we know that student loneliness can be a factor in poor mental health and well-being. The SU has seen significant issues with students lacking confidence and social skills since the return after the pandemic and is keen to explore with the university effective ways to combat this. For example, UEA colleagues from Student Support, the Student Information Zone and UEA Sport joined a World Café event to discuss the increase in student conflict we have seen within student groups and student households, which will likely be impacting their ability to study.

5. Conclusion

At UEA the student experience is generally good. Some issues affect the entire of campus such as Assessment and Feedback, but some aspects are truly excellent for all students at UEA such as the Library and Careers Central. What is key for students and the biggest takeaway from this report: what students both experience and get out of their degrees is inconsistent based on your school of study or demographic groups. For disabled students this is not having the same outcomes that able bodied students do. For international students this is not getting enough support from lecturers. For PPL students it's not having an advisor system that works for them. All students come to university wanting to gain as much as they can out of their education, but some groups don't get as much as others.

It's important to acknowledge that there are commitments from senior management, including the Vice Chancellor to tackle these problems, but the implementation of these commitments isn't yet fully yielding results. Only 46% of students think UEA Cares about them which is fundamental to their time at university. At the end of our focus groups, students were asked "Thinking about everything you experience at UEA, would you describe UEA as Excellent?". Almost all students said that it was good but that it could be better.

Authored by Undergraduate Education Officer and Director of Charitable Services

January 2023

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[i] Alterline is an insight and intelligence agency specialising in higher education. Over the past eight years, they have worked on over 60 university campuses in the UK including UEA to drive positive change. They regularly work with 15 student unions providing surveys and analysis of student experiences.