

Student Submission TEF 2023

1. Approach to evidence-gathering

As the University's I took the lead on the Student Submission with support from the full-time Union staff is made up of the Student Liaison Officer, two Student Liaison Assistants and the Student President. Leeds Arts Union supports student creativity through bringing students together across different courses and levels, as well as through societies,

As a specialist Arts Union we emphasise ways in which we can support students creativity. This includes organising public facing exhibitions and events, encouraging student collaborations, funding creative projects and publications, and commissioning students for design work that promotes the Union's activities. In doing so we believe we provide an important element of our students experience which links to their academic and professional development and involves partnership with the University and its various departments eg Marketing, Employability and Student Welfare. In this submission however we have focussed on consulting students specifically about their academic experience and support from University departments.

The Student Executive Team is made up of students from a variety of courses and years, who run in our elections for different officer roles. There are 12 roles available every year, from Sustainability Officer to Student Governor. Each has their individual responsibilities as well as coming together for a monthly meeting to pass and vote on ideas. We also have a regular meeting with the Vice-Chancellor to share ideas, feedback and discuss how the student voice is being represented.

We also have Student Representatives elected by peers on each course. They speak and listen to their fellow students and take forward issues, problems and positive feedback from their course and university experience with university management, course leaders and tutors, and the Union during regular meetings throughout the year.

No "Optional Courses" were included in this Student Submission. In creating this Student Submission, I presented the final draft to our Student Executive Team. I have worked with my university by having regular contact with the University Submission Contact, our Pro-Vice-Chancellor Student Experience and Resources, through the Access and Participation Development Manager to help support and resolve queries. We also arranged a mutual sharing of a draft which was agreed upon by both parties. Only I was involved in the writing of the student submission, but our student Executive team looked over the final draft before submission. The University did not unduly influence the content of this submission.

For data collection, I started with the information on the student experience and outcomes data dashboards. The University gave me access to National Student Survey comments, and I reviewed Student Representatives' feedback forms from the past two years. In the end, I decided it was appropriate to collect evidence specifically for this Student Submission including an online survey, focus group and email consultations of current students.

The Students' Union conducted an online survey from November to December of 2022. This was to gather information about three main areas: environment, feedback and impact, and resources

and facilities. The survey was sent to all undergraduate students and there were 96 responses across all undergraduate courses (4.5% of our 2,111 undergraduate students) with 12.5% being Student Reps (4.9% of total students). The courses that were under-represented in responses were BA (Hons) Creative Advertising and BMus (Hons) Popular Music Performance.

The survey was mainly filled in by students in their first year so this group was over-represented (46% of students who responded). Students who identified as female made up 73% of students who responded, similar to our undergraduate population during the TEF period (76%). 80% of students who responded identified as of white ethnicity, also similar to our undergraduate population during the TEF period (81%). The survey asked 6 questions relating to three main categories of student experience: feedback and impact, resources and facilities and environment which then informed the focus groups.

The Students' Union held two focus groups in January of 2022 to gather more in-depth responses after conducting our survey. All students across undergraduate courses were invited. Potentially due to assessment deadlines around the same time, only two Level 6 BA (Hons) Illustration students attended. We asked the students about four main areas of student experience and outcomes: feedback and impact, environment, resources and facilities and educational gains.

The Students' Union also conducted email consultations to support the aims of the focus group and get more in-depth feedback from a wider variety of students. The same questions from the focus group were used in these email consultations, which were sent out to the Student Executive Team, Student Representatives on courses, and all 15 undergraduate course teams to share with their students. Students were asked to answer the questions they could and were not required to answer all. Responses were received from students (contacted through their course teams) as well as Executive Officers and Student Representatives.

2. Student experience

Feedback and impact

On the Students' Union survey, students were asked "Does the feedback process make you feel confident in developing your work?" and these are our main findings:

There were consistently positive views, with regular comments made about the process giving confidence and motivation. Students from 6 different courses spoke mainly about one-to-ones with tutors and saw these as a positive opportunity for feedback. They mentioned that these individual tutorials provide helpful insights and allow students to narrow down ideas. Students from 8 different courses talked about the group crits system being helpful. The group crits system allows peers to review and give feedback on each other's work, meaning students can adjust their outcomes accordingly. Students on the BA (Hons) Comic and Concept Art course talked positively about having weekly group crits and that this regular feedback makes them feel confident. The main priority for improvement taken from this question in the survey was more tutor feedback if possible as in bigger classes you don't seem to get as much independent tutor time.

Regarding feedback, students were also asked on the survey "Does it challenge you to create your best work?" Again, students consistently responded "yes". Students from 6 different courses mentioned also group crits in response to this. They talked positively about how group crits allow you to showcase your work and challenge you to try harder and get out of your comfort zone. Also, being able to get inspiration from peers was talked about positively as different students have a variety of artistic styles to get this inspiration from. Students from 5 different courses talked about

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how they are encouraged to try new things and experiment, which challenges them to make their best work.

During the focus group, students were asked “How does having a variety of individual tutorials and group tutorials help you develop your practice and outcomes? Do you get different kinds of feedback within these?” The focus group participants felt that on the BA (Hons) Illustration course, one-to-one tutor feedback is more helpful than group crits because tutors’ help is in line with assessment criteria.

The main priorities for improvement that were taken from the focus group in terms of feedback and improvement were that group crits would be more successful if a tutor wasn’t present, to force the students to talk more. Students sometimes feel peers lack the confidence to be critical of other people's work.

Responses to the email consultations mentioned both kinds of feedback as helpful. Students said group crits were mainly helpful in providing inspiration and that individual tutorials allow for more tailored questions and concerns to be resolved.

Environment

On the survey, students were asked “Do you feel the University has a stimulating environment to benefit your creative practice?” and these are our main findings:

There were consistently positive views overall, with students from 8 different courses commenting about how the broad array of creative students at Leeds Arts University allows for a stimulating and supportive environment, which promotes engaging discussions. Students from 6 different courses said it was their tutors that inspire students and create a stimulating environment. The main priority for improvement taken from this question in the survey was even more art on the walls such as murals, posters, and larger scale things on the blank walls.

Students were also asked on the survey “How is Leeds Arts University special?” Students from 8 different courses viewed LAU as special because they were surrounded by like-minded students, in a tight-knit community. Students talked about how the LAU community is supportive, welcoming and makes you feel validated. Students from 7 courses said LAU was special because of the facilities provided. Students mentioned that these are open to use regularly meaning you can develop and progress in your practice. Students also highlighted the specialist facilities and the University being the only specialist arts university in the north. Students from 4 courses talked positively about collaboration with peers, group crits, and cross-course work.

During the focus group, students were asked “How does having a broad array of creatives stimulate you that you wouldn’t have at a non-specialist Arts University? How does this help your practice?” Students talked about how the LAU environment helps to create new perspectives, talking specifically about how the workshop staff do this by showing different ways of working. The students also mentioned that being able to talk to a variety of creative people adds to students' knowledge.

In the email consultations students talked positively about how LAU’s environment allows for collaboration and participation in other people's artistic projects as well as students' own work. Students talked about how LAU’s environment allowed for new ideas and for students to uplift each other.

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Resources and facilities

On the survey students were asked “What do you think stands out about the University facilities?” Students from 10 of the University’s 15 courses provided positive feedback about the library at Leeds Arts University. Students talked about how this resource supports their research practices and helps them gain a broader understanding. Specific library resources highlighted were the specialist artist books and special collections that LAU has to offer. Students also commented on the individual working rooms in the library that allow for quiet study.

Students from 6 different courses mentioned the digital facilities that the University offers. These include access to industry-standard Adobe software such as Photoshop, Illustrator and Premier Pro, which are fundamental to creative careers. Physical digital facilities were also spoken about positively, with access to computer labs and digital tablets being deemed as helpful to develop skills in preparation for industry.

Students across 5 courses mentioned that ‘staff’ stand out in terms of resources and facilities at Leeds Arts University. Positive remarks were made about the fact that LAU has specialist Workshop Instructors that make the facilities accessible to students at any skill level.

There were consistently very positive views about the specific facilities available for each course. Students from the BA (Hons) Fashion Branding with Communication, BA (Hons) Fashion Photography, BA (Hons) Filmmaking and BA (Hons) Photography courses mentioned the professional standard photography studios, digital equipment and the photography store that students are able to freely hire industry standard equipment from. Students from the BA (Hons) Fine Art and BA (Hons) Visual Communication courses mentioned that access to 3D workshops such as metal, woodwork and ceramics, as well as screen-printing, helped their practice. Students from BA (Hons) Textile Design and BA (Hons) Fashion Design mentioned the dye lab, print room and the fashion studios. Students from BA (Hons) Comic and Concept Art and BA (Hons) Graphic Design mentioned the digital print workshop, different printing methods and digital resources (that all students have access to) as previously mentioned above. Students from BA (Hons) Creative Writing mainly talked about the library. Students from BMus (Hons) Popular Music Performance mentioned the industry standard music equipment you can book out. Students from 5 courses spoke positively about how you can also access facilities not specific to your course. Some talked about how this is helpful for working as multi-disciplinary artists.

Students were also asked “How do you feel the resources and facilities support the development of your practice?” Students from BA (Hons) Fine Art, BA (Hons) Fashion Design, BA (Hons) Filmmaking, BA (Hons) Photography, BA (Hons) Textile Design, BA (Hons) Visual Communication and BA (Hons) Creative Writing talked about how the facilities support experimentation and trying new techniques, which allows for creative freedom. Some mentioned that the equipment allows you to explore different genres and styles of work. Students from BA (Hons) Fine Art said the facilities allow for more ambitious and larger scale works. Students from BA (Hons) Comic and Concept Art, BA (Hons) Fashion Branding with Communication and BA (Hons) Photography mentioned that because the facilities and resources are industry standard it gives you useful tools to support your future career. Students from BA (Hons) Graphic Design, BA (Hons) Comic and Concept Art, BA (Hons) Creative Writing and BA (Hons) Fashion Design discussed how the library helps to further knowledge, historical research, and both written and physical work. The main priority for improvement was being able to use the same equipment and facilities in all 3 years of

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university, not on a development basis from years 1-3 but starting out with the highest quality equipment.

During the focus group, the students were asked “How does having specialist art facilities help your creative practice, development and employability for the future?” Students talked about how the specialist art facilities such as the print rooms, 3D workshops and photography studios let them create more unique work and encourage students to explore different methods.

Responses to the email consultations mentioned that these specialist facilities allow students to try new processes and because the workshop staff is well-informed it allows students to discuss ideas with people who know how to use specialist machinery. The main priority for improvement from these email consultations was for all students to have access to all facilities. For example, creative writing students having access to the photography department, so they can explore multi-disciplinary work.

3. Student Outcomes

During the focus group, students were asked further questions about student outcomes. These focus group questions were also sent out to students in the email consultations.

When asked “How have you developed academically through being a student at LAU? What have you learnt that you wouldn’t have if you didn’t go to LAU?”, students talked positively about developing their research and essay-writing skills. They talked about how LAU pushed them to access a variety of research topics and look into non-mainstream ideas. They spoke about how they would not have researched such topics if not for LAU. The students said the library resource helped with this.

Responses to the email consultations mentioned that students have developed their technical skills, understanding and critical-thinking skills. More over students mentioned learning how to work alongside fellow creatives and writers in a supportive environment.

When they were asked “How have you personally developed through being a student at LAU? What have you learnt that you wouldn’t have if you didn’t go to LAU?”, students mentioned that LAU helped them to become more confident and independent, and has pushed students to network. They talked about the studio environment being human [personable and friendly] and welcoming.

In the email consultations, students said they developed personally by growing in confidence and independence while being at LAU, as well as having a sense of community. Students also mentioned that being at LAU has allowed them to hone in on specific interests in their chosen field.

When asked “How has LAU prepared you for working in industry? What have you learnt that you wouldn’t have if you didn’t go to LAU?”, students talked about how in their final year they are given a lot of preparation for commercial applications, mentioning practical skills such as screen-printing and bookbinding as well as creating websites. They also spoke positively about gaining work industry skills such as creating invoices and putting yourself forward for live briefs and competitions.

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In the email consultations, the main findings were that LAU has given students access to live briefs and industry placement opportunities and has given students a chance to meet independent publishers. In addition, students talked about how LAU has provided a strong community that helps to prepare students for industry networking. The main priorities for improvement that were taken from the email consultations for this question were for more theory classes to be given on artist-specific topics, such as making freelance contracts.

Students were also shown a selection of values from the University's strategic plan: respecting individuality, collaborative, interactive, multi-disciplinary, studio-focussed, externally engaged, independent-thinking, employable, networked with industry and responsive. When they were asked "Do you feel these attributes are reflected in your learning while you have been a student at LAU? How has LAU taught you these?", students talked about learning to be an individual, and to consider new applications of your creative practice.

In the email consultations, students agreed that this list of attributes were reflected in their learning, with emphasis on LAU teaching independent-thinking.

The students were asked "How else does LAU provide you with employability skills?" Students talked positively about the university's Employability Week, which takes place in Level 5, and the guest speakers that the university brought in. The students talked about how hearing successful artists talk about their strategies was helpful, such as how to navigate online shop fronts such as Etsy and Big Cartel. The students also talked about the mini-shows that the BA (Hons) Illustration course puts on at the end of term which provide practice for shows in the future.

The main priorities for improvement that was taken from the focus group were for the Illustration course to work more collaboratively in their first year. The students in the focus group also talked about how they wanted their class mini-shows to be open to the public more and have the possibility for cross-course viewings.