

Approach to Evidence-Gathering

The University of Bradford Students' Union (UBU) is the main representative body for students studying at the University. The Union represents students through our democratic representative structures that provide the 'student voice' to the University. Annually, students elect four sabbatical officers to lead the Union as trustees of the Union's charity, and to provide full-time representation in the following roles:

- Education Officer
- Student Affairs Officer
- Sports and Wellbeing Officer
- Community and Activities Officer

Our officer team report on the University student experience through the formal University governance structure. This includes:

- University Senate
- University Council
- Student Affairs Committee
- Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC)

Representation is also supported by the Union and University through the co-owned student representative system. Annually, circa 300-400 students are recruited as elected programme representatives. Additionally, the Union also gathers the views of students through the elected sports and societies executives of which 300-500 are elected annually, as well as through our elected council which meets monthly. The Union organises biannual general meetings with an open invitation to all students.

The development of this report draws on historic student voice reports. Making full use of the UBU's representative structures, these reports were authored by previous officer teams and presented to the University's senior decision-making committees. Access to the historical perspective of these reports has enabled us to present an informed student narrative concerning the University students experience from 2018 to present.

An up-to-the-minute perspective of student views has been gathered via a variety of student voice collection carried out during November/December 2022. The findings from this activity is presented within this report. Data collection activities included:

- A survey to current Student Representatives on TEF themes
- Four focus groups on TEF themes delivered to distinct student communities including:
 - Home Students
 - Students from minority and ethnic backgrounds
 - Students known to be engaged in extracurricular on campus activities
- Qualitative feedback from student representatives at four different faculty student voice events (16/11/22 and 22/11/22)
- Qualitative feedback from 150 students attending the Unions annual general meeting (21/11/22)

Introduction

At the beginning of the current TEF period, the University appointed a new Vice-Chancellor. This change in leadership has led to positive changes in how the University recruits and supports students. University leaders are keen to understand the views of students, and regularly initiate discussions with UBU student officers on how the University can improve the student experience.

During this time, the University have worked hard to improve the student experience through detailed understanding of and engagement with student demographics, and how best to support students through their individual journeys into post-University employment. The University have developed a new 'Learning, Teaching Strategy and Student Experience Strategy (LTSES)' to improve the overall experience for students and support attainment. There has been exemplary work around employability and student support, discussed in more detail below.

Under previous University leadership overall NSS scores for student satisfaction had dropped from over 84% (in 2015 NSS), to 76% in 2018's NSS. Notably during this period student satisfaction with Organisation and Management had declined by 13pp. University organisational change had a negative influence on staff morale effecting the levels of general staff support for students particularly around administration. The period since 2019 has seen a significantly enhanced working relationship between the University and UBU to address concerns, and a genuine spirit of partnership now exists.

Whilst NSS scores generally remained consistent in recent times, it is important for UBU to stress that the Covid-19 pandemic did impact the student experience. As such, metrics utilised to measure student satisfaction must be viewed in this context. More positively in 2020 Bradford outperformed the sector in many aspects of the NSS, including overall satisfaction. During the period directly affected by Covid restrictions, the University worked very closely with students and elected representatives to understand the unique needs of students throughout this difficult period. Our students appreciated the raft of supporting measures that were introduced to address their concerns and mitigate the impact on their education. Some noteworthy initiatives include:

- **Student communication:** During the initial period of uncertainty in the early weeks of covid lockdowns, University leaders understood the importance of communicating with students who were anxious about their learning experience, and development. The University utilised UBU's communication channels for joint messaging, including several Q and A sessions.
- **Emergency Academic Regulations (No detriment policy):** The University worked quickly to recognise student uncertainties relating to their academic provision when it was forced to close by the government. The University worked closely with students to gain an understanding of their concerns around learning, teaching, and assessment, leading to the introduction of the University's 'no detriment' policies along with a raft of changes to educational practice and associated support services. Significant there was rapid investment in and implementation of virtual learning tools and platforms for students to help shift teaching online.
- **Student voice in all key covid workstreams:** The University included UBU's sabbatical officer team on all committees/working groups established to address emergency changes to 'the student offer' through this period.
- **Provision of space:** The University allowed students who required space away from home to use University buildings as study spaces (within government guidelines). This was

especially important for our student body, many of whom live in multi-generational housing and struggle to find suitable spaces to study.

- **Assessments:** UBU appreciated the decision to assessments online, and the work undertaken to maintain academic integrity and standards.
- **Additional support:** The University introduced a scheme to provide laptops to students to assist in their learning. In addition to this, the University reviewed access to hardship funding to widen eligibility to support funding. The Student Life Team also commenced a 24/7 working model and provided isolation support packages and check-in calls to all students who contracted Covid. This included home food deliveries.

Throughout this period, the University actively listened to students' concerns about the impact of the pandemic and worked with UBU to find solutions. Despite these interventions, and our better-than sector NSS outcomes, it must be stated that Bradford students, like students nationally, were undeniably impacted by national Covid lockdowns and social distancing measures. Students did not get the student experience of other cohorts and did not have access the same quality of education or opportunities for personal development. Importantly, though, UBU and the University recognised the disconnect this unpredictable and unprecedented situation created and have since been working together to explore how to learn from the initiatives that worked to improve the relationship between students and the University as we move forward together. For example, the 2022-2023 academic year was deliberately designed around a heightened 'campus offer' and students welcome a return to what can be considered a normal student experience.

Student Experience

The UBU experience

The University of Bradford Union (UBU) provides support, representation, and opportunities to students attending the University and works in partnership with the University, championing and giving voice to the best interest of students.

Our philosophy is to provide an experience that is 'more than a degree' which is embedded into all our student services. UBU elected student leaders prioritise this message through our partnership with the University. The University is responsive to what our students say, and we are confident that students are at the centre of initiatives that engage and develop an extremely diverse student demographic. The student population is unique in comparison to the wider sector. Our student offer has been designed to be accessible to the needs of our students, of which 70%+ come from ethnic minority backgrounds, 25% of undergraduates are classified as mature students, and approximately 80% of students studying at the University are from the wider Bradford and Yorkshire region.

Students want to engage with our services. Our elected student leaders, and staff work directly with the student body and have a deep understanding of the social and cultural needs of students. UBU have created an engagement experience that is not restricted to the traditional Students' Union offering of sports, societies, and representation. We understand the barriers our students face and have developed our 'Kickstart' student development programme to be the main access point into our service.

UBU have created an engagement strategy that enhances students' non-curricular personal development, focusing on improving soft skills such as confidence, leadership, and cultural

understanding within our student community. Our Kickstart programme has been designed to engage students from their orientation into the University, fast-tracking participants into Union activities, and most importantly leadership roles that allow for social learning that providing students with opportunities to truly develop. We discuss this programme in more detail, later in the report.

During the TEF period, UBU have had to adapt our offer in response to the impact of Covid. UBU did not furlough staff and instead opted to move support services online, whilst offering online spaces for social learning, and where possible, in-person activities. This enabled us to continue to work closely with the University, to solicit and provide meaningful feedback and student insight, and inform their work during the pandemic.

Post-Covid the Union has returned to providing a broad range of activities and support to students. We are pleased to report that engagement levels are returning to pre-pandemic levels. UBU currently support over 90 students' societies, which have 1,584 members, and 32 sports teams with over 800 participants. Currently over 1,200 students register to volunteer in the local community. Additionally, over 400 students volunteer their time as student representatives or members of our council.

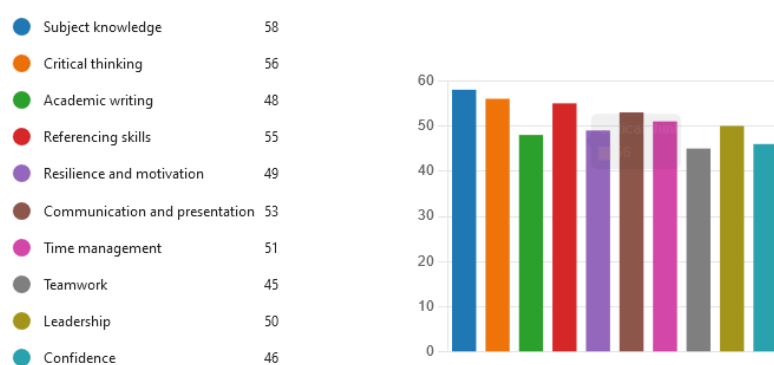
The Bradford Curriculum

The University curriculum is undergoing significant evolution. The principle of 'inclusion' sits at the heart of the University strategy, with an accompanying strong focus on student outcomes and employability. This strategic focus has developed to take account of student feedback to embed student support at course level and address themes that bear on the overall student experience. The University have committed to creating a student experience that 'is more than a degree'.

Work to connect the learning and teaching strategy, the Bradford Curriculum and our employability strategy has created space for academic course development that leads to positive improvements in the overall student experience. Metrics around student outcomes are already incredibly positive, and there is significant work underway to deliver more consistent results in relation to the student experience.

Student feedback has been very positive with respect to how the University designs its courses to promote graduate employability. The presentation of theoretical knowledge within this approach, allows students to understand the context of ideas and concepts before they go on to apply them in the workplace. Student feedback from our focus groups was extremely complimentary about the use of practical sessions and placements delivered across our four faculties. Similarly, feedback was very positive with regards to the integration of careers and employability services with the curriculum and across the broader student journey. There was consensus that the services provided to students were 'active and organised'. One example we would like to highlight is the common first year of the Engineering courses which an interdisciplinary approach called CDIO (Conceive, Design, Implement, Operate) to promote collaborative learning, problem solving, and confidence building.

When surveyed on career preparation, 100% of student's respondents reported that they had developed or gained at least one skill while at University. On average, students have developed or gained seven academic or transferable skills (see the table below). This feedback supports developments by the University for a student experience that is 'more than a degree', and clearly demonstrates that students understand the education gain they are obtaining from their studies.



Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

The University works continuously to improve satisfaction with learning. There are some outstanding examples of brilliant teaching and learning, but there are also some inconsistent elements or areas that will form the focus for enhancement. In terms of the former, there are several subject areas where the University excels. In this regard, BSc Forensic and Medical Sciences; BSc Public Health and Community Wellbeing; BSc Physiotherapy; and BEng Chemical Engineering all received a score of more than 80% in the 2022 NSS for quality teaching. Our students surveyed for this submission scored teaching, learning, and assessment experience a 7.1 out of 10 with a consensus that course content is generally positive.

Team Based Learning (TBL) is another area where the University has excelled in delivering a mode of teaching which benefits student development and positively contributes towards student outcomes by vastly improving learning and assessment practice. The implementation of TBL has transformed the BSc Pharmacy course and is an example where students have played an important role in the development of their course through positive and impactful partnership working. Another example of good practice is the use of simulated learning opportunities within the curriculum. The use of state-of-the-art, high-fidelity mannequins in the Paramedic and Midwifery courses demonstrates a positive aspect of innovative teaching. This investment from the University is particularly valued by students who appreciate that not all learning experiences can take place in a real work setting. In this situation the use of stimulation effectively supports students to develop the knowledge, skills, and experience to prepare for what they will experience in practice.

Additionally, 'formal' teaching and learning experiences are complemented by peer-led learning opportunities. In this respect, student feedback tells us that peer-to-peer support in the form of Peer-Assisted-Learning (PAL) represents an area of good practice. Learning with and from students who are further along their learning journey creates an open learning environment for students with spaces in which students can discuss how they can be involved in the wider student experience and extra-curricular activities. UBU also supports peer learning in the form of language classes for both international and home students. These sessions are designed to enable students to deliver lessons on conversational English for international students or students for whom English is not a first language. More broadly, UBU are currently developing our suite of academic societies in conjunction with academic faculties to ensure spaces are available for communities of learners to learn together outside of the classroom.

Generally, the University is excelling in providing a high-quality student experience. However, there are areas of the provision that require enhancement. A lack of consistency in how students experience learning and teaching was raised as an area of concern during the evidence-gathering events. It was found that satisfaction regarding course content varied and is often attributed to the

inconsistencies in overall satisfaction. Many who are unsatisfied with their courses have attributed this to the staffing levels, Adult Nursing being of particular concern.

However, because students have been central to the development of the University's Learning, Teaching, and Student Experience Strategy, and accompanying Bradford Curriculum, we are confident that they will bring more good practice and consistency of satisfaction across the University, and address student feedback gathered in preparing this submission.

Academic Support

Academic support is key in ensuring a positive student experience and good graduate outcomes. The University have invested a great deal in academic support services, clearly demonstrating that there is an understanding that academic excellence can only be achieved if students' general wellbeing and student experience is prioritised. When surveying our student representatives on the accessibility to academic support, our representatives rated this provision as 7.35 out of 10.

The University has a plethora of student support services which include MyBradford, the Counselling and Mental Health Service, Student Life Team, and Disability Services, all providing welfare and support that enables students to fully engage with their studies. There is also a wide range of academic development and skills support. These services have been centralised within the Student Central building (co-located with the Student's Union). UBU also supports students through our independent Advice Centre, which provided support to over 1,300 students during the recent 2021-2022 academic year. The Union's independent advisors provide support to students on themes including welfare, finance, housing, whilst also guiding students through University processes such as extenuating-circumstances, academic integrity, and appeals.

The centralisation of these services means that students can access the support they need without having to travel between buildings; it allows the union, often a 'front door' for support – to easily and effectively signpost a student to the appropriate service. During our focus group sessions, students described academic support services as 'easy to access, friendly and understanding'. It was easy for students to book individual appointments and services were reported as being quick to respond to student needs.

In addition to physical centralised support services, the University invested in a 24/7 helpline provided by Health Assured. Whilst the service is still relatively new and thus difficult to assess in term of long-term impact, UBU welcomes the University's decision to provide further online support to students and feel this is an aspect of the University's offer that has continued to be enhanced in line with student expectations. UBU recognise that good practice exists with support services having self-access resources, self-booking, and are student-led in their approach to service delivery. However, in our focus groups students expressed that they wanted more self-service options, for example, a central guidance 'portal', a self-help dashboard, that would help students directly interact with the right service.

Given the demographic make-up of our student body, many face major economic challenges. The University has a significant hardship fund available to support students with their finances, as well as providing various scholarships and bursaries. The University has not only substantially increased its Student Support Fund this year, with significant increases in the maximum award (from £2k to £3k), but also adapted the eligibility and assessment criteria to better support students. Supplementing this, UBU also support the students with a smaller crisis fund limited to providing funds for emergency situations. In recognition of the challenges presented by the cost-of-living crisis, the University and UBU collaborated to open an on-campus student foodbank.

Moreover, the cost of living was a point of discussion across all our student outreach events with students expressing a desire for greater financial support and an increase in provisions such as more scholarship opportunities for current students, and funding toward other aspects of the student experience. Students commented that they would like support traveling to placements, and self-funded course related equipment costs.

Supporting students to succeed is a clear strength of the University. However, there are two specific areas in which it could improve. Students regularly report concerns with the consistency of the Personal Academic Tutor system (PAT). Feedback tells us that the quality of PAT support varies between courses and between individual tutors. Some students reported having excellent, helpful, and responsive PATs who are easy to access. However, others find that PATs are hard to contact, unresponsive, are not adequately equipped to help with pastoral queries. This demonstrates a need to improve the consistency of practice, building upon identified areas of good practice.

Finally, based on NSS scores, 'organisation and management' is an aspect of the University which students would like to see improve. The most common issues raised relate to timetabling. Our Student Reps report that the delays and last-minute modifications being made to the timetables has made it difficult for students to plan sufficiently.

Educational Environment and Learning Resources

The University has invested in improving learning and support spaces around campus. Investment has included the colocation of the campus to a single city-based site, centralisation of student support services, improvement to social learning spaces across the campus, and notable changes being made to the Richmond Building Reception. The data gathered via our online survey rated the University's environmental and physical campus 7.53 out of 10. This was the highest score awarded to any question topic within the survey,

The use of Canvas (our VLE platform), and other virtual resources, has significantly improved in recent years, and was the primary method of content delivery during the lockdown. The University must be commended for how they adapted very quickly to integrating new teaching practices during this period.

The University Library is a key provider of support to students and is the recipient of very positive and consistently high NSS scores. The Library has its own suite of development courses, including information and research skills and plagiarism awareness modules. These courses aim to ensure high levels of academic conduct and good academic practice are maintained. The quality of the library support is reflected in the Customer Service Excellence Accreditation Award. The development of the IT Bar in this space has been a seemingly small change, yet simultaneously a major development which students and staff are benefitting from.

Finally, UBU are pleased with efforts made by the Library to decolonise resources. In recent years, the learning resources have shifted from a predominant focus on Eurocentric resources, with investment being made in providing academic texts from authors of different ethnicities, cultures, and backgrounds, therefore allowing students to get varied points of view through this expansion of learning resources.

During our focus groups, discussion on this topic did provide some suggested areas of further improvement students would like to see. A recurring suggestion from students was for increased investment in the development of more social spaces around the University, including, but not limited to, cafes, department-specific spaces, and spaces to carry out group meetings. UBU would

like to see further investment in the design of social learning spaces that encourage engagement, as we believe this will further ensure students have an experience that is 'more than a degree'. The University has already presented their long-term plans of developing more general teaching areas and social spaces to the officer team which UBU were pleased to see, and hope will contribute to increased student satisfaction in this area.

Student Engagement and Voice

UBU and the University work in partnership to ensure that there is a strong student voice and meaningful engagement across the University. Students are encouraged to participate in the student representation system which is supported by both UBU and the University. The Student Representation Policy was revised in 2022, with changes being made to simplify the arrangement of student/staff meetings and encourage student experience discussions in the formal meetings. This policy change also formalised the arrangements for the 'Student Affairs Committee', a monthly meeting between senior University leaders, and the UBU sabbatical team. The meeting had previously been a more informal meeting, therefore it did not feed into the formal university governance structures.

UBU have taken time to revise how the Union supports Student Representatives. Over the 2022 summer period the Union invested more resources into its' student voice department, and revised the method in which students were trained and supported. 2022 saw renewed focus on representation, with increased support from academic faculties in the election of representatives. This support provided UBU with more time and the ability to focus on engaging students. When accessing student perspectives on the changes made this year during our research, Student Representatives responded to a survey question on how well the University engaged with students, leading to improvements in the student experience, which was scored 7.33 out of 10.

The 2022 Student Representative recruitment process has a productive cycle with just over 400 students in post, a significant increase in comparison to recent years.

	22/23	21-22	20-21	19-20	18-19
Overall Number of Student Reps	421	333	324	350	311

As of 28th November 2022, 33% of Student Representatives have attended an SSLC meeting in the 2022/23 year. Feedback from those who had attended one meeting were 100% positive, reporting that meetings were well structured, students felt they could voice the concerns of their peers, that they were listened to by academic staff, and healthy discussions were held. Representatives reported that regarding concerns raised, 61% resulted in an action, improvement, or conversation. Students feel as though they have confidence in being a representative as their voices are being heard, and their feedback is being seriously considered. For example, action plans are agreed as to how to better support students. Reps are reporting that they feel the University listens to students and provides many opportunities for students to raise their concerns and feedback. The University, from the Vice Chancellor through to Lecturers and Programme Administration staff, are proactively engaging with students.

Finally, outside the established structure of the Student Representative System, students' voices are also heard via the relationships made between the Sabbatical Officers and the University's Senior Management Team, in which extraordinary student cases can be brought to the attention of senior leaders, and for appropriate support to be identified. In recent years, there has been an increased effort to enhance the relationship between student leaders and the University senior

management team. It is the belief of our sabbatical officers that the University wants to listen to student views and actively seeks the opinion of students.

Student Outcomes

The emphasis of creating an educational experience that is 'more than a degree' is clear to students, with the University embedding careers themes into the curriculum, and providing student opportunities through the Careers and Employability Services, Faculty-specific employability and employment opportunities, as well as funding UBU to engage students in extra-curricular activities. The success of this is reflected in the University being ranked 49th out of 132 institutions for graduate prospects in The Times Good University Guide 2023. The strategic shift to continually improve support services is also reflected in students with a disclosed disability performing + 2.5% above the sector benchmark for graduate outcomes.

At our student insight outreach sessions, UBU discussed themes of student employability with students. During our focus groups, feedback was generally positive about the University's Career and Employability Services. In particular, positive commentary was offered on the use of placements on courses and the way this was built into learning and teaching.

The Careers and Employability Services are also credited for their work engaging students from postcodes identified for widening participation as part of the Graduate Workforce Bradford (GWB) project. The GWB programme engaged students from Bradford, particularly Asian ethnic minority background students. UBU commends this workstream and would like to see further targeted courses like this one to continue to improve employability statistics for this demographic. Good practice also exists with regards to the Bradford Employability Award, and the HEAR.

UBU Student Development Programme

As part of the student submission, UBU would like to highlight the Union's Kickstart Student Development programme. The programme has been designed to enhance the Union's contribution to the enhancement of student employability, alongside improving student engagement with the University student experience. The Kickstart programme begins from the moment a student joins the University. UBU work closely with both University academic and professional services to facilitate the student engagement.

The Kickstart programme begins with a two-day residential at an outdoor education centre in the Yorkshire Dales, with four residentials taking place at the beginning of each semester, it is open to all new students. The weekend itself is made up of activities that are high energy and include ice breakers, problem-solving, team challenges, limited time scales and financial budgets, all for the groups to self-manage. Students continually move from one challenge to the next. The group cook and live together for the duration of the trip while providing a space where students can talk freely with staff and peers. Real bonds are formed during the weekend and a challenge is set in the evening where students commit to an engagement activity with UBU that they can participate in throughout their time at Bradford.

The programme itself was launched as trial in January 2020, with Covid bringing a premature end to activities. UBU continued aspects of the award during the Covid pandemic and used elements of the award system to encourage student engagement with Sports/Society Executives and Student Representatives. The programme was relaunched in September 2021, and now has run for a complete academic year. 380 students participated in residentials in the 2021/2022 academic year, over six residentials.

Subsequently, UBU replicated residentials for student election candidates, resulting in the highest turnout in five years. The delivery of the project has been successful, with many lessons learned throughout development, and the impact can be measured by an increase in student engagement across UBU. Student participants have gone on to sit on the UBU Council, start sports clubs and societies, volunteered in numerous projects across Bradford, organised trips across the UK for their peers, promoted Kickstart and UBU to their friends, engaged in regular activities, ran liberation campaigns, and have received an Employability Award.

Conclusion

The University has worked hard to create a student experience that is 'more than a degree' and this has led to improvements in student outcomes and the overall student experience. During our consultations with students, it was clear that there were enhancements taking place, and students recognised areas of excellence.

The period covered in this report was impacted by the Covid pandemic, which prevented students from having the full student experience due to national lockdowns and restrictions. Students were disadvantaged by the pandemic, missing personal and professional development opportunities. However, UBU and students appreciated the interventions made by the University to provide support, and the adaptations made to learning and teaching. Despite the pandemic there are particularly good employability metrics, and we are pleased that themes of personal development are embedded into the curriculum. It is also clear that investment by the University into the centralisation of student support services contributes to positive academic support and student outcomes. This strategic focus has led to incredibly positive outcomes for students from ethnic minority backgrounds and students with a disclosed disability.

The University is committed to providing a high-quality student experience. There are areas of good practice within the University which demonstrate that new strategies are contributing to student satisfaction. We are hopeful that the overall experience for students will become more consistent, as strategies are fully implemented, as well as continued investment into campus resources.

The University listens to students and is responsive to student feedback which helps in ensuring a high-quality student experience. As Education Officer, during my term in office I have been welcomed by the University and my voice has always been clearly heard. I have been given every opportunity to voice student concerns or my own professional opinion. The development of formal and informal meetings to listen and react to student concerns contributes towards an environment in which the student experience is always prioritised.