

The University of Leicester's student submission has

been produced independently of the University of Leicester, but the University has been available to support with data provision and analysis.

Introduction

We are proud to be the voice of the student body in presenting this TEF submission which attempts to provide an authentic description of the student experience at the University of Leicester. No one student's experience is the same and no student experience can be fully quantified. Therefore, what we have tried to capture is the broad nature of the general student experience, through current and historical data.

What we have found is that students love their time at the University of Leicester, not only because of their studies but also because of what happens beyond their studies. Their enrichment does not stop once they walk out of a lecture hall, but continues, supported by extracurricular activities enabled by the Students' Union (SU), which seek to provide fun opportunities within a student-led community that develops the student; support that ranges from department book clubs to housing advice to city tours; and a community of staff and fellow students who all care about each other and strive to do the best they can for each other, and the world.

When we, as a Students' Union, think of the University, we think of partnership. Not only with our students, who we are of course led by, but with the University. Academics and Professional Services alike are guided by student voice and always take the time to listen and learn. The University may not get everything right the first time, but they are always learning and growing, recognising the importance of Student Voice and acting on it whenever they can – the student experience drives what they do and what they offer and is embedded in every member of staff who steps onto campus.

Approach to evidence gathering

In starting to think about the data we would need to write our TEF Student Submission, we considered the historical student data we had to hand, and what new data we would need to find.

Historical evidence

Available to us were:

- Minutes from Student Staff Committees, dating back to the 2019/20 academic year
- NSS results, dating back to the 2018/19 academic year
- Internally conducted Voice surveys carried out annually (including but not limited to Sticky Campus Conference, LeicsChat, Conversations)
- Minutes from our Academic Rep Forums which are conducted in collaboration with the University
- Submitted ideas and debated topics from our Ideas System (a simple way for students to submit ideas about changes they'd like to see made at University)
- Student Councils, ranging between the 2018/19 and 2021/22 academic years
- The TEF data dashboard as published by the Office for Students
- External surveys such as the national Graduate Outcome Survey

New evidence

TEF Survey

As the guidance recommended a focus on current students, we also decided to conduct a new internal survey. The structure and questions in the new survey (herein referred to as the TEF Survey) were informed by themes that appeared frequently in the historical data. The chosen headings were teaching and learning, support, and feedback and assessment.

First year students (September 2022 entrants) were excluded from the survey due to the limited teaching they would have received at the point of data collection (dictated by the student submission deadline in January) which thus would not have been representative of the Leicester teaching experience.

The survey went live on September 21st 2022 and was open until midnight on November 30th 2022. It consisted of 32 questions related to the chosen headlines (teaching and learning, support, feedback and assessment), decided upon by the Students' Union President and Education Officer, again informed by the trends identified in the historical evidence.

We received 882 valid responses to the survey, 6.31% of the eligible current Undergraduate students.

The majority of responses (59%) came from students in their second year. 61.45% were women, 53.94% were men, 1.81% were non-binary. 43.31% were white, 10.54% were Black/African/Caribbean/Black British, 37.71% were Asian/Asian British and 8.84% identified as Other (ethnicity groups taken from the ONS).



TEF Focus groups

Alongside the survey, we also ran five TEF focus groups, again focusing on the headlines identified from the historical evidence. The focus groups provided more detailed and anecdotal evidence to support the statistical data gathered from the survey. Of the five, two were general (open to all students), one was Law School, and one was exclusive to School and Course Representatives. We also held one specifically for Black students, given the prevalent Awarding and Satisfaction Gaps at Leicester, which demonstrates that Black students consistently have a different experience to their White peers.

Summary

Due to the representative nature of our Student Voice system, it is impossible to pinpoint just how many students have been engaged through our data.

We estimate that, from the 2018/19 academic year to the 2022/23 academic year, of a possible 58,955 Undergraduate students, our historical and current evidence is informed by a minimum of 20,000 students. This number is also an underestimate, given we cannot guarantee how many students a Representative would have interacted with to gather the feedback given through any of the Voice mechanisms.

All students directly quoted are elected representatives part of our democratic Voice system, and therefore are able to speak on behalf of a wider student experience than simply their own.

Student experience

The following section addresses the primary make-up of a student's teaching experience at Leicester: learning resources, feedback and assessment, academic support and miscellaneous factors.

Teaching and Learning

Teaching and Learning considers everything related to the broad experience of our students: quality of learning resources and teaching facilities, including the estate; attendance and timetable; module specific concerns, and how they are addressed.

Inspirational education is one of the pillars of Leicester's offering and 92% of our surveyed students reacted positively when asked if they were left inspired by their teaching, with 33% saying they often felt inspired. Our student voice repeatedly tells us that students enjoy their learning when they have engaged and supportive lecturers which, luckily, Leicester seems to have in droves.

"Being a research focused University, Leicester is great ... as the lecturers are always following developments in their fields and on hand to help the students whether it is about the curriculum or just their own interest areas." - Biological Sciences

"University of Leicester Law School pleasantly exceeds expectations when it comes to module convenors and tutorial leaders being more hands-on, available and having an interest in students' academic performances." - Law

"I'm 100% energised by my professors.

I think it's really good, they're

fascinating. [sic]" - Geology

"Leicester has some amazing educators. On many occasions, instead of creating boring lectures they use their skill to create an engaging learning experience. This is really helpful to my learning as it means I'm less tempted to avoid revising topics which are extremely dull." - Medicine

Attendance and timetable covers access to teaching environments where events have been scheduled in a way that either benefits or hinders students. The comments identified in this section are those that would be dealt with by the central timetable team, not individual departments. It also considers the return to campus following the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions and how Leicester adapted to hybrid teaching.

Often raised at Academic Rep Forums (ARF) and Student Staff Committees (SSCs), attendance and timetabling influence the student experience as they are directly linked to attainment and continuation. Leicester's recently undertaken SUMS review of timetabling demonstrates that the student concerns we identify are corroborated by staff stakeholders across the institution. Whilst short term issues can be fixed quickly by a dynamic team, recurrent problems remain that are not so easily or quickly solved.

These ongoing issues are reflected in there being 141 active concerns (SSC, AR) related to attendance and timetabling: due to newly opened teaching sites that are removed from the central campus, students are often rushing between events scheduled back-to-back, causing lateness and disruption to the teaching event; labs being scheduled at the same time; medical adjacent courses having events scheduled on Wednesday afternoons which prevent them from participating in BUCS events, reducing their extracurricular engagement; timetables not being released sufficiently in advance to allow students to prepare.

However, work undertaken by Education Officers, in collaboration with the timetabling team, shows that smaller issues can be fixed. Examples of positive outcomes include allowing comfort and food breaks in multiple hour lab sessions (Biological Sciences), changing teaching spaces

due to heating issues (Media, Communication and Sociology), and implementing a 'light week' for third year students where no new learning materials were released (Biological Sciences).

67% of our surveyed students felt teaching was better quality in person ("*easier to understand*"; "*more interactive*"; "*more personal*"; "*more engaged*"; "*lecturers seem more invested*") while 21% felt it was the same and only 12% thought it was better online ("*allowed to go at own pace*"; "*good resources*"; "*accessible*"; "*more organised*"; "*less rushed*"). Another consistent concern with 'hybrid' teaching is value for money and lack of consistency across Colleges and courses.

89% of surveyed students thought they received more than 5 hours of in-person teaching (excluding placements) in an average week, with 70% saying they only had between 0 and 5 hours of teaching online. This suggests that Leicester has been successful in its promise to try to offer as much in person teaching as possible, but the spread is still skewed across Colleges. CASSAH saw less in-person teaching compared to CLS and CSE (2021/22), leading to complaints from students who felt they weren't getting as much value for money as their peers from those Colleges.

Learning Resources were also heavily impacted by the pandemic, as the provision had to adapt to wholly online teaching. The biggest complaint that arose from this was the use of old and/or out-of-date materials by lecturers, especially pre-recorded lectures, which students felt should have been recorded new for the new academic year (2021/22). This can be considered only a snapshot of learning resources though as the University, like everyone in the sector, had a limited time to adjust to remote teaching.

Of our surveyed students, 43% said they were satisfied with the learning resources available to them and 24% said they were extremely satisfied, with 10% saying they were unsatisfied or extremely unsatisfied. When asked how often the advance materials available left them feeling engaged in the topic, discussions and readings, 47% felt they were 'often' engaged and 3% saying 'not at all.'

Learning resources still remains the third most raised issue at all our Student Voice forums, with Blackboard frequently causing concern. However, Student Voice consistently suggests that the problems with learning resources are administrative and not related to the quality – they were inspired and engaged with the content, but it must be uploaded on time for it to actually support them in their learning.

The NSS data supports this, as it shows that learning resources is the University's highest scoring area (82.65%) in 2022: 78.13% agree that the IT resources and facilities have supported their learning; 85.63% agree that the library resources have supported their learning well; 84.50% agree that they've had access to course-specific material when needed.

The University are also consistently investing in improved learning resources: the library has undertaken a digitisation exercise to increase the number of online resources available to students and £20,000 was invested in the purchase of laptops and similar IT devices to ensure enough provision of short-term and long-term loan laptops for students who may not otherwise have access to them.

Estates and facilities have been categorised as relating to teaching facilities, including any IT related issues (excluding Blackboard) within the University estate. Concerns in this area range from small (Medicine students wanting an increase in bins in learning areas to encourage recycling) to items relating to health and safety (concerns about the lift in the building, Museum Studies) and accessibility (poor wheelchair access to key teaching buildings, Engineering).

Provision of study space is often a big cause of concern for students as they wish to be able to study comfortably on campus, both individually and in groups, which has been raised through student experience surveys and focus groups. The library has bookable study rooms but often these are booked far in advance and there is very limited availability. To tackle this, the University added more private study rooms in an alternative building to the room booking system, increasing availability and alleviating some of the concern. Additional study space was also introduced in the latest campus development (Freemen's Common) and added in the Oadby Student Village.

Research undertaken as part of the jointly led 'Sticky Campus' project has identified the need for more social study space, better Wi-Fi provision across campus, and the need for Schools to have physical 'homes' on campus. These changes have been informed by Student Voice and will strengthen the sense of belonging on campus. Sticky Campus has demonstrated the University's commitment to listening to students and taking on their recommendations to make tangible changes within an academic year, proving their flexibility and willingness to improve, as well as their more than positive engagement with the SU who drove the fruition of Sticky Campus.

Module specific comments are those directly related to specific modules within a course. This category covers the broadest range of issues, due to differences in how each course is organised and taught. Although these concerns are not always reflective of the general student experience, they do sometimes have positive impact beyond the individual module.

Such a case was raised with the lack of content warnings around the sensitive topic of gender-based sexual violence raised this . Consequently, the University, held a working group to establish clear guidelines across the institution to implement content warnings for certain, sensitive subjects. The projects saw academic and professional services come together to support student welfare so that all students would feel able to engage fully in their education. Again, what is shown here is the fully realised idea of partnership, as the University responds to Student Voice for the sole purpose of improving the student experience.

Assessment and feedback

Assessment and Feedback is the most raised topic at our student voice forums, consisting of a 24% of all comments raised (there are 9 categories comments can fall into and assessment and feedback total ¼) with 74% of issue still ongoing since 2019/20. This is similarly reflected in the NSS, with only 54.23% agreeing that feedback on their work was timely (2022).

Despite the University extending the window for feedback to be returned (from 21 calendar days to 20 working days), assessments returned late with inadequate feedback is still a complaint. However, 55% of our surveyed students felt that they'd broadly received feedback on their work within 20 working days, with 31% saying 'occasionally' and 13% saying they didn't feel they received timely feedback. 59% felt the feedback they received was helpful to their studies, with 34% saying it was somewhat helpful and 13% saying it wasn't helpful:

"It's shocking. It's so bad. We have to wait. We have a deadline, but the feedback we get is months and months down the line ... by the time we get the feedback, I've forgotten the essay."

The suggestion is that, in spite of the new rule, staff are still failing to return adequate feedback on time to students, hindering their academic development. Students are also keen to have more formative assessment that can help them grow:

“It would be more conducive to our learning to have more opportunities for smaller assignments and essays through the course ... so much of the course is based on writing style and it would be helpful to have more formative assessments [individually marked] so that we have a better idea of where we are in the course.” - Law

The School of Arts has listened to student feedback on this point and introduced many formative assessments. One such example is in English:

‘During the module, you will submit three short (500-word) formative pieces of writing, and each time your tutor will give you feedback and an indication of the level of achievement according to the marking criteria ... These formative assessments are designed so that you can practice your writing in different contexts and learn how to build on your strengths and focus on areas for improvement.’

When it comes to final year dissertation support, students feel more supported due to the one-on-one nature of supervisor support and progressive building of the assignment in collaboration with staff:

“The dissertation process was well-managed with staff laying out a clear timetable of students’ expected progress near the end of year 2 ... the department was always flexible with allowing students to do a topic of their choosing, even if there wasn’t a supervisor with direct relevant subject knowledge.” - HYPIR

SSCs suggest that when staff listen to students concerns and make changes (deadlines amended and arranged to be released well in advance before assessments are due, assessments are due, clarity to be provided for objectives of modules and assessment requirements as soon as possible after reading week, there is positive engagement with students, and they feel more supported.

Academic support

Beyond their experience in the classroom, students are impacted by the quality of support available to them to support their studies. We’ve broken down academic support into personal tutoring, mitigating circumstances and accessibility. Generally, our surveyed students stated that if they needed additional learning support, 53% knew where to find it, with 33% feeling semi-confident and only 18% completely unsure.

Personal tutors (PTs) are offered to all students by the University of Leicester, except in Law and Business. The premise of the relationship is that the staff member proactively meets with and supports the student throughout their entire academic career at Leicester, often supporting multiple students at a time, providing both academic development and pastoral care. In the Schools of Law and Business, a different model was adopted to offer a Year Tutor (YT), supported by a team of professional services support, rather than individual PTs.

93% of our surveyed students said they knew who their PT was, and 81% said their PT had been in touch with them, with just 53% said their PT was supportive and helpful. Again, the engaged staff are highly regarded amongst the student body, but the issue sits where this is no engagement:

“Overall, the personal tutors are amazing and provide progressive guidance on our career and academic development. However, as this is an extra role for the staff, there are slight inequalities at times in student experience with their tutor. This is reflected due to slower response times for enquiries but when the tutors are available, it is a great experience!”

"In person, [my personal tutor] is very supportive, and offered tailored information to support me with my Year Abroad. This was very helpful to me, especially when I came back, as I was very isolated but knew I could go whenever I needed." -

To ensure continual growth the PT programme, is developing a Personal Tutor Benchmark which will offer a set of guidelines and expectations for tutors to follow. This replicates the Blended Learning Benchmark that was introduced following the lifting of restrictions, so that students knew what to expect from their teaching. The co-delivery of the Benchmark from the Students' Union and University ensured it was student-led and embedded across the entirety of the institution to encourage consistency.

Mitigating circumstances are offered to students to extend the deadline on their assessments. It has been a point of contention for many years about the onus of evidence provision being on the student; in 2017, students were expected to produce a death certificate to evidence that a close family member had passed away to guarantee them an extension.

Following strong Student Voice and University collaboration, this proviso has been removed and the mitigating circumstances has seen a procedural overhaul that has prioritised student wellbeing. There are now more allowances for mental health impeding assessment completion and self-certification for racial trauma that previously went unrecognised as a reasonable impediment.

51% of our surveyed students did not feel that the provided support for mitigating circumstances met their needs, and suggestions for improvement included *"more human response"*; *"period option needed"*; *"option for people on NHS waiting list"*; *"rules/evidence need to be clearer."*

During the pandemic, following lobbying from the SU, the University removed the need for evidence in mitigating circumstances requests. This empowered students to protect their mental health and, most importantly, trusted students as autonomous stakeholders in their education who are responsible enough to meet deadlines when they are able to. The decision was received positively by students and it was even continued beyond the return to campus teaching, allowing students time to adjust.

"The introduction of the no evidence policy for mitigating circumstances was a fantastic move. It allowed students with long term conditions, short term flare ups, mental health conditions and many other reasons to accessibly have some extra time for assignments and exams without further imposing stress of giving evidence which can be hard to obtain and negatively impact the student further."

It is clear that the University has come leaps and bounds in its mitigating circumstances provision, partnering with the SU to understand what is needed to properly support its student body, and actively taking thought in delivering a system that is pedagogically sound and informed by students.

Accessibility, delivered at Leicester by the AccessAbility team, considers access to teaching environments, resources and learning materials, as well as any other issues that may affect students with additional needs. Comments that arise at SSCs in relation to accessibility are often quick fixes that have just not been previously asked for because no one with the need has been on the course. An example is the adaptation of PowerPoint slides to fit the accessibility needs. This reflects the quick, supportive work of departments to adapt to provide support when it is needed.

On the other hand, there are institution wide issues, often linked to technology, that reduce the accessibility of resources, including lack of closed captioning on lectures, poor wheelchair access to buildings, poor audio function in classes, and slow response times to students needing diagnosis for neurodivergence:

“ I went to them, whereas I've got all these assessments from when I was younger, and asked if I can get extra time. [The uni] said they needed their assessment ... and it was about 400 quid and I couldn't afford it.”

Recognising their need to address accessibility issues, the University has introduced strategies to improve, requested by the Liberation and Education Officers. These include the recently begun Captioning Task and Finish Group and the now completed physical, digital and learning space Accessibility Audit. Both centre the student experience in seeking to understand what changes need to be made to increase accessibility at Leicester.

"Over the last year and half, I have found that The University of Leicester does all it can to support students with accessibility needs and signposting students to the most relevant support services. This has made my studies easier to keep up with when accessibility issues arise. As with any system in place, things can go wrong, but students can voice the concerns and can be confident these concerns will be taken onboard and looked into, so improvements can be made.”

Miscellaneous

Like everyone in the sector, Leicester had to adapt to provide remote learning during the pandemic but, unlike everyone else in the sector, Leicester has also been subject to the UCU's 2020/21 global boycott and strikes every academic year since 2017/18. Both caused disruption to teaching and, we feel, are essential to understanding the local student experience.

Industrial action has been primarily led by UCU and caused cancelled teaching sessions, a marking and assessment boycott and staff working to contract. Issues raised at SSCs show that sometimes solutions are possible: students would like to have access to handbooks/materials that will be missed over strikes, and to know how marks for Computer sessions will be taken. In these cases materials were provided, and additional revision sessions put on lectures rescheduled if they were cancelled due to strike, and support from module leaders was provided to catch up with missed content

More often though, industrial action causes ongoing issues that are still unresolved: worry that international students don't understand the strikes, as not much has been communicated the class were not given advice about the assignment before the strike, and struggled to gain support during strikes in December meant no class was raised again by reps

Even though strikes cause disruption to the teaching experience, students have continuously voted in favour of supporting UCU in their industrial action (through the online polls the SU has held when strike action has been announced) and remains the most infrequently mentioned topic at Student Voice forums.

COVID-19 forced the entire sector to reassess their delivery, and, at the University of Leicester, the opportunity was taken to codify some of the previous partnership work in the SU to produce the aforementioned Blended Learning Benchmark (BLB). The BLB promoted consistency, structure and clarity, outlining what was expected of Schools, staff and students. It was successfully implemented across the institution and has sparked models of practice at more local levels, such as the Personal Tutoring Benchmark.

Student outcomes

A student's experience at university influences their pathway as a graduate, and Leicester promises that its graduates will leave as Citizens of Change. Its founder, Astley Clark, rightly states that education alone is an asset of which an individual cannot be robbed, and a Leicester graduate can define that education as inspiring, research-led, confidence building and geared towards social, cultural and employment mobility.

"The support provided by the Law school and my tutors enabled me to utilise my interpersonal skills, developed through pro-bono, to succeed
" - Law

Only 7% of our surveyed students felt that Leicester didn't support them in developing transferable skills to support them in graduate life, with the rest of the students stating that their skill set was broadened as a result of their education here. Some of the transferable skills included cultural awareness, compassion, creative thinking, advocacy, innovative thinking, confidence, resilience, self-motivation and more technical skills, like manual handling, programming and coding, problem solving, financial literacy and analysis.

"The department organises multiple career talks from alumni and provides career services for ensuring the student is ready for life after university. These provide valuable insight into course specific careers but also for alternative options from student's passion and interests." - Biological Sciences

All of a Leicester's student teaching experience thus supports them in progressing positively in the graduate world, with 94% of Leicester graduates in full time employment or further education six months post-graduation (Graduate Outcomes Survey).

"After completing my undergraduate and masters [sic] degrees at the University of Leicester, I felt I had the skills and resources to begin a successful career and am now working in Higher Education using my degree to make positive change at other institutions, mirroring what helped me at Leicester." – Geology

"I did both my BSc and MSc at UoL and my four years at Leicester definitely gave me the confidence and experience I needed to land my job now. I had a great four years with hands on research projects and the opportunity to develop outside of uni too,
I gained confidence,
leadership and many other skills through this. I now work

across a range
of business areas with many exciting opportunities such as the chance to live abroad!" –
Medical Genetics

"The University of Leicester emboldened me to be the best version of myself and go after what I want. It's here I learnt confidence, built my networks and finally understood what I wanted to do after graduation. I never expected to be so assured of myself but the teaching gave me the foundation to trust in the very skills it gave me." – English

"I finally found passion in my education at Leicester, after studying abroad previously, because they care not just about education but about *my* education. Me, as an individual, and how I could grow within a research focused institution that makes students feel at home. My professors were actually in the field, hands-on, teaching me from their own work so I felt truly connected to it." - Criminology

Conclusion

The University of Leicester is an institution which never forgets about its students – they are the driving force in all they do.

Partnership work has defined recent developments: to tackle the Black Awarding and Satisfaction Gap, the Black Student Experience Working Group and Curriculum Consultants Project have been jointly set up; the Hidden Costs Project was launched by the SU and funded by the University to ensure affordability and accessibility; LeicsDecolonise, tracks the decolonisation work across the institution and ensures best inclusivity practice; the Blended Learning Benchmark was informed by students and staff alike; and Academic Rep Forums are delivered by the SU with topics chosen by student and staff to ensure relevance and authenticity.

The current cohort of students are more supported than ever, with their experience at the heart of every decision made by the University. Of course, there will always be room for growth but, wherever that growth takes the University, it will certainly be student-led. Over the last few years that growth has been tangible, with direct change and improvements made to the student experience that has seen their NSS satisfaction rate stay steady, even throughout the pandemic, a deserved achievement.

The University has recognised the Students' Union as a critical friend but always sought to strengthen that friendship by listening and learning. It is evident in their gold standard Student Voice, which shows again the tangible improvements they have made and will continue to make.

Just as they ask their students to be compassionate and inclusive, so are the staff and so is the institution – teaching is the one thing every student experience shares and, at the University of Leicester, that teaching is scaffolded by student voice, research, care and a true desire to see every student flourish in the future.