

1. Approach to evidence-gathering

Student Contact

Name:

Course:

Year:

I hold the Equality and Diversity Officer position in our Student Union and am a Course Representative.

The other students involved in gathering evidence for this submission are:

BSc (Hons) Psychology and Sociology
BSc (Hons) Psychology and Sociology
BSc (Hons) Psychology and Sociology

I have used various resources to evidence this submission, including pre-existing evidence provided by the University and research carried out by myself and my peers named above.

The existing source of evidence I have used (as provided by the University) are:

Internal survey 2020-2021
Internal survey 2021-2022
Programme board minutes 2020-21
Programme board minutes 2021-22
NSS Survey results 2022
Database of staff qualifications and training
Feedback from staff on Adult Mental Health First Aid Training
Disability statistics and feedback
OfS report relating to disability support
Course Rep meetings minutes
Support Boards overview document
Learner Voice strategy
2022 Matrix report re IAG
Student experience anecdotal evidence/ case studies
OfS Dashboard Attainment Data
Careers and Employability feedback and evaluation

The extra evidence gathering I have undertaken is as follows:

Staff focus group
Disability focus group
Course Representative Survey
Student Governor interview

2. Student experience

In November 2022, the University conducted an internal student survey to ascertain students' responses regarding their learning and progression. Twenty-six students participated, and were made up of a variety of year groups and courses, with 100% of them agreeing that they "feel satisfied that the university offers additional opportunities that enhance your studies (this may be guest speakers, additional qualifications, workshops, work experience etc.)?". For example, a year 3 student commenting on guest speakers added, "It puts what I'm learning into a real perspective outside of university study".

The "real" perspective the student discusses can also apply to a fellow student who responded, "It helped to manage my mental health so that I was able to maintain uni work, my attendance and my personal life."

An internal survey in 2021-2022 had 299 participants from across the University, and 83% of these agreed that the University had helped them to develop their confidence and enabled them to present themselves better in future pathway progressions.

In another internal survey conducted in 2020-2021, 60 students participated, and 93.8% reported that they either completely or mostly agree that the teaching on their courses is intellectually stimulating, that the staff are enthusiastic and make the subjects interesting and explain the subjects really well.

In the same survey, 92.5% of the students stated that they were happy with the assessments and feedback provided. They found that feedback was detailed and informative giving direction for improvement, published on time, and reflected the senate scale.

However, in 2021-2022 the same questions were answered with 303-310 students participating (participants varied as not all questions required an answer). The results showed a slight decrease of 90.75% of students agreeing that the teaching on their courses is intellectually stimulating, that the staff are enthusiastic and make the subjects

interesting and explain the subjects really well. However, the same amount of students responded with 89% happy with assessment feedback.

Feedback from a selection of year 3 students on the Psychology and Sociology degree, year 3 Early years and year 2 counselling was very positive about their work experience. Students expressed how beneficial the work experience element is to them. For example, a year 3 Early Years student said, "the school I have been doing my work placement in have offered me a position to stay on with them, paying for my QTS". A year 3 Psychology and Sociology student has been able to connect with various charities as a result of her work experience and has stayed on as a volunteer and got invited to attend an awards ceremony for her project was voted for. A few counselling students explained how their confidence has grown since starting placements, and their belief in themselves and their abilities has grown. These engagements with employers have proven to be successful for many students at the University, aided their personal development, and prepared them for work once they have graduated.

Year 3 Psychology and Sociology students expressed how having professionals from varying careers come in and video call in to discuss their careers and possible pathways have really helped them look into career options previously they were unaware of. These experiences have helped shape future careers, and being able to ask questions and talk with other professionals about their practices is a great asset the University centre offers.

In a recent focus group held in November 2022 with six staff members held by myself, we found that, on the whole, staff were pleased with the support they are provided. The staff consisted of three lecturers, one programme lead, one head of department and one widening participation officer. All staff agreed that a recent mental health first aid course and certification were highly beneficial. They explained how the knowledge they gained from the course has helped them deal with students suffering from mental health challenges as well as assisting them in spotting the signs of ill mental health development. In addition, the training helped shape their choice of words when speaking to students to ensure they felt supported and comfortable in opening up to them, enabling them to help the students get the necessary support.

The university centre also hired a librarian from the house of commons to assist staff with decolonising their reading lists to improve their academic practices. The teaching staff found this valuable to ensure that all students felt accounted for and highlighted the significance of offering more diverse literature. However, one lecturer did make it known that in their course, their subject is underdeveloped in other cultures, which provided reasoning as to why their reading lists were not very diverse; however, they added a few more alternatives that were found to their lists. This staff member acknowledged that this was not something they had previously considered and found the training inspiring; they are committed to finding more diverse material for their course.

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They also advised that the University invests in their staff's progressions by paying for staff to undertake master's degrees and PGCE; in the last 2 years, 10 staff members have benefitted from this professional development, and the feedback has been positive. In addition, staff have shared that by the University investing in them, they can share their knowledge and better the education of their students, creating better outcomes and pathways.

As a university centre, the disability support team offers students progressing from Further Education (FE) to Higher Education (HE) support on adjustments that can be made for them that will be in place before commencing their HE studies. They also offer student support with applying for Disability Support Allowance (DSA) applications. This was verified during a recent case study I conducted in November 2022 with students, all using the disability support team. For example, a student who recently transitioned from South Essex College on an FE course explained, " and really helped me feel supported and not like an idiot when I was struggling with my DSA application. They reassured me, and it made me feel like I had definitely found the right University to help me reach my goals". The 2019 OfS report further verified this, it was reported that the South Essex University Center was Good. A direct quote from the report says, "The college has considerable experience of supporting disabled learners' progression from further to higher education, both within the college and to other higher education providers. Students are supported by a personal higher education disability adviser throughout their transition from further to higher education. The adviser provides encouragement, and gives impartial advice about options for accessing support to help them make informed decisions about their next educational step".

The team also advised that students with an EHCP and/or in a High Need category are targeted specifically to support them through the transition period, including providing interim support at the beginning of the term until the appropriate DSA support is fully in place. During a case study, a student on the course explained that when they started at the South Essex University Center, their 1-2-1 support did not begin until December 2020; they advised that this was due to Covid complications, but University kept him informed of any progress. This student did not use the support from the team with their DSA application and did this with their parent.

The Disability support team said that when a student with a specific learning difference does not have the appropriate evidence, we will pay for a full diagnostic assessment to enable them to apply for DSA. In addition, where disabled students who are provided with assistive technology via DSA need to pay the first £200, we will reimburse them where this is a financial barrier to them accessing the support. A case study of a student confirmed this to be the case; when they started University, they did not have any diagnosis of disability. However, the University supported them in getting their formal diagnosis and put everything in place regarding assessments and learning before the formal results came back. In addition, they have helped in receiving the apparatus that makes learning easier, increasing confidence levels and abilities. The uptake of the support for DSA is 43% of the HE population at the University Centre.

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During 2021/22, the team received 192 disability disclosures, and 83 already accessed DSA-funded support.

Information in all 3 case studies showed that the students were delighted with their lecturers' support. For example, one reported that fonts on PowerPoint were enlarged to help visibility, and when a new lecturer started, they were made aware of their needs and helped them progress. Another reflected that being given early access to the lesson's PowerPoint meant they could concentrate more in the class and 'take it in more'. The third said that their lecturers print the lesson powerpoints out for them as they prefer a hard copy to place their overlay on and that the lecturers are very patient with all the questions they ask when unsure of something.

Overall, all 3 case studies revealed that their academic achievements have progressed alongside their confidence levels due to the support provided to them by the Disability Support Team.

Physical support for students at the University is shown in various ways, from tutors to support staff to the library. For academic support, however, during 2020-21, 103 requests for support were met and given, which rose to 197 in 2021-22. Currently, 87 learners have accessed academic support to enhance their abilities. This support is advertised throughout the University Centre as well as tutorials based around it with the introduction to the support advisor to establish familiarity making students more comfortable with seeking support. A third-year student said, " is great; she knows what she is doing and is so friendly in her approach; no question is too stupid; she goes above and beyond". Another third-year student advised that "after getting support from , a few days later, she saw me in the library and asked how I was getting on; this follow-up support made me feel noticed and supported; I would definitely use the support again in the future".

Other physical resources consist of the 3,801 books students have access to in the library which cover all subject areas. However, thanks to the £45,000 investment into learning resources in response to the pandemic, a further 12,049 eBooks are available for students not wanting physical resources. These books again cover all subject areas plus further reading for dissertation-specific research. These eBooks are now available in the new Online Library implemented in autumn 2022. From September to November 2022, the library received 1,615 logins from students accessing and learning how to use the new library. Lessons were provided, and student feedback has improved on the old system of Sherlock. Although Sherlock received many logins, 4,644 in 2021-22, feedback was poor. Students' feedback claimed it had too many options available and was overwhelming. Feedback regarding Sherlock submitted internally and through the NSS helped shape the new Online Library's design and options.

The learner voice conference in 2022 provided an excellent opportunity for students to engage with staff, support staff and other students. Various activities were organised to get students to voice their opinions, share their thoughts, look for pathway progressions

and promote team building. A second-year student who attended the event said, "the event was great; I got to meet college students who were fearful of University and collectively opposed to progressing to one; the staff running the events allowed us to discuss the benefits of coming to University. The FE students then asked loads of questions about why we go to University, the fees, workload, the support and more. A few months later, I worked at a university open event and found one of the FE students actively looking for universities. She explained that discussing her fears with university students helped her realise that she wanted to go to University and was currently writing her UCAS statement." This feedback highlights the fantastic opportunity the conference was by introducing a platform whereby students could speak to other students and gain an objective perspective.

The universities engagement with students was also highlighted as a strength in the 2022 Maxtrix review saying, "Within Student Experience, services are seamless, with, for example, Wellbeing and Safeguarding and ALS working together with many of the same students, or Wellbeing and Safeguarding and Funding. This was evidenced by students describing the support received as a whole without reference to individual departments". This finding was backed up with recent feedback from course representative meetings; students had advised that "the safeguarding team were amazing during the enrollment days, they didn't make me feel bad for having mental health problems and discussed what help can be given to me to help in university" this was fed back from a course representative from their class.

Overall, the University's student feedback is positive, with overall satisfaction from the NSS increasing over the last 5 years, although this did decrease in 2021 owing to the pandemic and teaching adjustments having to be made. Still, the results from 2022 show satisfaction levels rising, showing that the University engages well with students through the pandemic and continues to improve.

2018- 75%

2019 -78%

2020 – 82.24%

2021 – 73.19%

2022 – 79.25%

An interview with the student governor revealed that "Liked the idea of having the opportunity to sit at a high level and have a role in making decisions on behalf of students at the college." found this was an excellent opportunity to gain additional skills for future careers and allowed for networking which will serve well when completes her degree in June. This opportunity for engagement benefits the student Governor and the students at the university.

3. Student Outcomes

Recent figures from the student attainment data shows that in the last graduating year of 2021/22, 49 students graduated with a first-degree honour. The number of students graduating with a first-degree honour has continued to increase each academic year, with an extra nine students graduating with this result in 2021/22 compared to 2018/19.

Despite the covid-19 pandemic and the hardships it brought students, with online learning and the impact on mental health, in the graduating year 2020/21, there were 45 students who graduated with a first-degree honour's, 13 more than the year previous. These results reflect the support that the university centre provides its students to help them succeed. A past student, when commenting on their experience at the University Centre South Essex said, "At the University Centre you get all the support you need to succeed". The University helps to support students by offering the HE Support Fund, which in the academic year 2020/21 supported 143 students, 105 of which were helped by the covid support fund. In response to the HE Support Fund student survey question "Has the award you received reduced the risk of you withdrawing or taking time out from your course?" 82% of respondents said yes. The extra financial support offered by the University, helps to ensure that students are able to succeed within their studies, allowing for better progression when leaving University.

Within the degree programmes that are graded by distinction, merit and pass, the year 2020/21 had the highest proportion of students graduating with a distinction, at 20 students, since the academic year 2018/19. These attainment results also reflect the support that students were given by the University during the covid-19 pandemic.

Graduated students have gone on to prosper in their perspective careers. One student who graduated from the Film and Television Production BA (Hons) degree in 2017 commented "The University Centre prepared me for the workplace by putting me in real world situations. Strick deadlines, communicating with me like a colleague and not a pupil and not to mention the industry-level equipment". This graduate is now working as a senior videographer for one of Europe's leading carp fishing brands and has had the opportunity to travel around the world. This student also commented "my time at the University helped 100% with my confidence. I'm not a confident person and there's many moments you don't look forward to when studying, presenting in front of a class for example, but these are the things that really help you develop, and confidence is something that has been key to my career development". The development of personal skills while studying is something that this student attributes to their ability to develop to a high-level role within their career.

Another student who graduated from the Fine Art degree in 2020, also spoke on the support the University Centre provides in building students confidence ready for future careers. They said, "my time at the centre improved my self-confidence and made me believe in myself and my ability". This student, as an artist, currently organises and

curate's exhibition's and in the future is looking to undertake a practice-based doctorate research in 2023. They also added they "gained valuable collaborative, organisational and leadership skills while studying".

Both graduated students spoke on the equipment provided by the University to assist in their studies. The student from the Film and Television Production degree spoke "the equipment at the university, especially the editing software's and machines are identical to what I use and what I always have used in the industry". The level of equipment provided to students gives them the ability to develop their skills to a high standard and prepare them for the industry. The facilities and equipment that the University provides its Fine Art students has allowed the Fine Art graduate to develop their art style, as they added "the university centre provided me with the basic equipment and studio assistance in printing, woodwork, and sculpture studios. Now my painting style is deeply rooted in printing". The University allows its students the opportunity to flourish and advance their skills ready for when they graduate.

At the University Centre South Essex, the student experience is focused on more than what is taught in a classroom, helping students develop skills to succeed academically and thrive in the workplace. For example, the Academic Skills support/Workshop made one student "feel more confident" writing essays. This data came from a Course Rep Survey in which 26-course representatives participated. At the University Centre, we ensure every student is supported in their ability to access all of the Learning Resources available.

Furthermore, the HE Support Wellbeing Support and Advice services available to all students helped a student "maintain uni work, my attendance, and my personal life." Positive student outcome was managed by giving the student the advice and support to balance external pressures to allow for the completion of university work. This was achieved by helping to "manage my mental health, " further demonstrated by another student who explained that the service "helped me manage my mental health, anxiety and depression." Welcome/Induction events were beneficial, with enrolment making the "introduction to HE... a lot smoother and helped with my anxiety toward going back into education." Therefore, mature students benefit from welcome events by accelerating feeling comfortable in a HE environment, creating a positive environment to facilitate academic success.

Careers and employability help students develop skills through employability interventions specific to the student's course, focusing on soft and technical skills for work. To achieve this, workshops and 1:1's to individualise the advice are used. In addition, Masterclasses and guest speakers allow for an in-depth understanding of workplace/industry standards. Key skills developed through this include communication, presentations, and team working. As well as this, LinkedIn training teaches the importance of networking and creating opportunities immediately upon the student leaving University by using connections to establish and gain footing in a chosen field through connections with people already in the industry.

The Careers workshop benefitted students of all years, with first years aware "that there's a lot of people around to help us out with careers in the future." This prepares students to think about where the degree will take them from the beginning, allowing them to use the full degree to explore options and determine the right outcome and employment for the individual. Meanwhile, third years using the 1:1 service found " was very helpful and supportive of my career options and helped me discover more paths that I had not previously considered." Therefore, the 1:1's introduced different outcomes for students to consider and explore, creating the chance for more success and career mobility once the degree is finished. General support put in place, such as the employability awards, allowing students who engage in it to practice skills employers would like to see and be recognised for how many they did successfully through a bronze, silver and gold reward system that praises hard work in different areas skill development for employability. The University successfully tailors additional opportunities to the interests of students studying different degrees. For example, all 26-course representatives unanimously answered yes to feeling satisfied with the additional opportunities that enhance their studies. The additional opportunities were tailored to the course by identifying beneficial skill development for students. Psychology & Sociology second-year students gaining Mental Health first aid training "was extremely beneficial" as it was timed right before placement which the programme highlights as a major opportunity and incentive. The placement gives a valuable experience that can be put on a portfolio and provide insight into industry standards and practices.

Furthermore, due to the topics and areas worked in for psychologists and sociologists, the mental health first aid training allowed students to succeed by demonstrating the skills learned to support the people they worked with themselves. Another student noted that the training would "help after graduation", showing student consideration of training for success beyond the degree. This can be further seen with a student noting the additional opportunities will help "enhance... CV." As a result, students are aware of the additional opportunities supporting the outcome of gaining employment through gaining more skills to highlight and impress employers. First aid training is a more general opportunity offered by the Uni; however, knowing the training in a situation where it is needed benefits everybody.

Guest speakers have introduced "specialist fields" in degrees students "know little about", creating new outcomes through awareness of even more employability options. Industry mentors are similar to guest speakers but deliver sessions three times a year with tutorials and portfolio-building sessions, which gives opportunities for students to be at an advantage when applying to work in the field with experience and having on their portfolio what industry professionals want to see (seen with interior design students.) Graphic Design & Illustration has industry mentors that individualise the experience.

End-of-year shows, including Southend Film Festival, give creative courses support in onward employability when the degree ends so students can easily find work immediately. BSc (Hons) Psychology and Sociology & BA (Hons) Counselling use a mandatory placement module further demonstrates this, involving DBS and adherence to industry

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requirements to give students an idea of getting placements in the future and getting ready to work in their chosen field.