

Student Submission from Reading University Students' Union (RUSU)

Approach to Evidence-Gathering

This TEF Student Submission is written and compiled _____, with assistance from the Students' Union Student Voice and Representation team. _____ Full-time Officers at RUSU, _____ leads on representing students' academic interests and is responsible for the Students' Union's academic initiatives, meeting regularly with Senior Reps.

We have used various pre-existing data sources to inform this submission, including: TEF data metrics; NSS registered data from the past four years (2019-2022); Student Union membership-wide research undertaken by Redbrick, a research agency (April 2021 report - 627 respondents and May 2022 report - 475 respondents); statistics from our 2022 Excellence Awards; University Research Opportunity Placement data (2020-2022, held with Careers); Careers Report data (2018-2022, held in CoSED Archive) and the RUSU Online Learning Review Survey (February 2021). In addition, we have gathered data through three focus groups, ran in October 2022, aimed at specific student groups: international students _____ home students _____ and disabled students _____

We also created and distributed an all-student survey (hereafter referred to as the RUSU Survey) which was sent to all undergraduate students (164 responses, Autumn 2022); the majority of these responses are from RUSU Course Reps We also distributed a targeted survey aimed at Black and Minority Ethnic students to our members _____ and a flash email survey to our elected undergraduate Course and Senior Reps _____ Comments made by students Reps in Consultations (Autumn 2022) were also included. We note: none of this data is particularly representative of the student body at large.

The data available to us, combined with where students are most engaged, led us to focus on specific Student Experience (SE) and Student Outcome (SO) features of excellence. We tackled every SE, apart from SE4 which we saw as particularly focused on staff. As we have limited SO-related data, we instead focused only on SO4, SO5 and SO6 as these could be drawn from current student experience. Whilst writing this submission, we met regularly with the University and participated in open discussions relating to our submission and the University's provider submission. We thank the University for their support throughout. Whilst they have taken an interest, they have made no attempt to influence our content and have been forthcoming with relevant data. Finally, thank you to the students who took part in our focus groups and surveys, their contributions have given a greater student voice and depth to our work.

SE1: Teaching, Feedback and Assessment Practices

Teaching at the University of Reading for full-time undergraduates sits just below its 82% benchmark with 81.3% achieving these experiences from 2019-2022 (TEF NSS Data). Whilst these numbers are still very high, there is some variation across Schools. This ranges from Education and Teaching students scoring 5.5 percentage points (pp) above benchmark across the 'Teaching on my course' NSS questions, to Computing students scoring their course 11.8pp below benchmark (63.3%). Redbrick data is slightly more favourable, with the 'My Course/Learning

Education and teaching students at UoR scored 91pp across 'Teaching on my course' questions from 2019-2022 (TEF Data).

Experience' metric for full-time undergraduate students sitting at 65.9% agreement in 2021 and 73% agreement in 2022. This puts the University in a strong place within Redbrick benchmarking, the University achieving 0.8pp and 1.3pp above the medium of the universities surveyed in 2021 and 2022. Overall, these figures support the predominantly excellent quality of teaching that students receive at Reading. Most teaching staff are engaging, good at explaining concepts and supportive of each students' learning in both online and in-person environments: *"The course content is interesting to learn about and the delivery content is great as every lecturer is enthusiastic about the module that they teach"* (1st Year Zoology student, RUSU Survey). Moreover, where students are confused about concepts, academic staff almost always spend time explaining these concepts further: *"I feel like I am learning a lot and I have great teachers. If I need to clarify a concept, I just ask"* (2nd Year Real Estate student, TEF-Targeted Survey). With 99% of students agreeing that their lecturers and academic staff are experts (72%), or mostly experts (27%), students largely have a high level of confidence in the teaching they receive. This is also supported in that the Scale 2 Learning Opportunities average for the last four years is 80.2%, sitting just below the benchmark average of 80.8pp (2019-2022, NSS Data), which shows students at Reading have good opportunities to learn and clarify learning.

Assessment feedback can be a mixed bag at the University of Reading. However, it is an area that the University is addressing. Although still below the NSS Assessment and feedback benchmark, the University now sits at 66.0%, within a percentage point of the sector average at 66.4% for full-time students. This is a notable improvement from 2019-2021 when it was 3pp below benchmark. The NSS 'Feedback on my work has been timely' question, although still not at pre-pandemic levels, is now just above benchmark. Feedback speed was also only mentioned negatively in textual comment by 1.5% of the 2321 respondents in 2022, in contrast with 2% of the 2500 respondents in 2021. These improvements have also been marked in Redbrick data. In 2022, 82% of 475 respondents were either very satisfied, satisfied, or neither satisfied or dissatisfied about their academic feedback, whereas in 2021, 608 respondents scored 79% on this metric. Overall, the University has done well to hold its assessment feedback statistics against the sector benchmark and improve on these statistics as well as its approach to assessment and feedback post Covid-19. However, the helpfulness and personalisation of feedback received remains a key issue for students at Reading and an area for further improvement. Question 11, 'I received helpful comments' represents the widest consistent drop from the sector benchmark within the Assessment and feedback NSS questions for the University, currently sitting at -2.3pp off benchmark. These issues are further reflected throughout students' comments on feedback around clarity. Some comments from students note that it is difficult to see actionable change from feedback: *"The majority of feedback I receive is usually single word annotations... they are not sufficient"*, *"Feedback by some instructors is extremely helpful, others provide only generic comments"* (RUSU Survey, 2022).

Inconsistency, as well as natural variation in feedback, between Schools plays into many negative perceptions around assessment feedback: *"feedback is useful and timely, but there is a lot of difference in how much detail different [markers] provide"* (2nd Year Art student, RUSU Targeted Survey). Nonetheless, these are perceptions that the University is working hard to change, especially in launching its 'focus on feedback' campaign where emphasis has been placed on sharing staff guides

"Assignment briefs and marking rubrics are always clear and easy to understand and find" – 2nd Year Environmental Science student, RUSU Targeted Survey.

and best practice. Assessment feedback has also been a recent focus of the Student Panel and, using student feedback contributed by student panellists, the University and RUSU have co-created a guide and flyer, 'for students, by students', focusing on how to use feedback more effectively and where to go if you need help. Furthermore, negative comments have often overshadowed excellence within specific Schools where there are strong examples of tailored, effective feedback alongside clear communication regarding expectations of assessments. With both Engineering students, who scored 13.6pp above the sector benchmark and Education students, who scored 6.2pp above sector (TEF Data), these statistics show that feedback delivered by the University is often detailed and supportive of student learning. Even where Schools are below benchmark, very positive experiences can still be found: *"Feedback across both departments is beneficial and helpful"* (2nd Year Art and English Literature student, RUSU Survey). Additionally, where some Schools have periodically trialled voice-note feedback, students are supportive of how tailored and structured this feedback feels.

SE2 and SE3: Course Content and Delivery, Research, Innovation, Scholarship, Professional Practice and Employer Engagement

Most students feel that the University delivers exciting programmes, featuring interesting course content that inspires them to engage effectively with their learning. When surveyed, 98% of students stated that the content of their course inspired them to engage with their subject outside of class, 41% answered often, 46% answered sometimes and only 11% answered rarely (RUSU Survey 2022). These experiences of students being actively engaged and stretched to develop skills on their course is backed-up by the University's Continuation, Completion and Progression metrics all sitting above sector benchmark. This is also reiterated later in this submission when we discuss Student Outcomes, as 75% of Course Reps feel that students are supported in achieving the University's graduate attributes including the development of personal effectiveness, self-efficacy and intellectual curiosity (Course Rep flash survey, 2023). Whilst some students have expressed that engagement falters in some lectures as *"PowerPoints are very long"* (TEF Home Focus Group) and over-relied upon, these are normally isolated experiences: *"Sometimes lectures are not as engaging... but I have not encountered many bad lectures, mostly they are wonderful"* (1st Year Law student, RUSU Survey). Most students agree that their classes are engaging and content taught is relevant, with 61% of students stating this was always, or often the case and only 32% stating this was sometimes (RUSU Survey).

"Clinical content and delivery is always highly relevant and inspiring. Delivery is excellent and highly engaging; I wouldn't change a thing" - 2nd Year Speech and Language student, RUSU Survey.

The Covid-19 Pandemic caused teaching to move online in 2020 and 2021. The University was quick to organise virtual teaching and made relaxations to its student support, digital support funds and exceptional circumstances policies to ensure students could continue to engage with their learning with confidence. Covid-19 caused disruption to teaching across the sector and Reading was no exception. In a survey, only 65% of 571 undergraduate students described their synchronous teaching materials as satisfactory or better, and 63.4% describing their asynchronous

"The enthusiasm of the staff. They are aware how hard it is and they themselves don't like this new way of teaching and so they are more willing to answer emails and have one to one teams calls to discuss work." - 2nd Year Maths and Statistics student, RUSU Online Learning Review.

teaching materials as satisfactory or better (RUSU Online Learning Survey, 2021). However, the pandemic showed academic staff deliver a high quality of support, with 80.4% of students agreeing staff either responded within a reasonable time, or were very responsive. Another key shift in delivery was the positive response to screencasts and recorded content. Many students noted the benefits of flexibility in learning online and that they enjoy *“being able to pause and rewatch the lectures.”* (3rd Year Economics student, RUSU Online Learning Review). Although the University now conducts all teaching in person, its students still benefit from the flexibility and wealth of resources that lecture recordings and former screencasts bring in: *“The in-person delivery is refreshing in comparison to last year's blended learning, it's helpful to still have online resources to refer to but much more engaging to have the in-person support”* (2nd Year English Literature student, RUSU Survey).

Central to the University's delivery and successful engagement of students is its practice of instilling course content with innovative research and experience of professional contexts. Students are taught and supported by expert academic staff with 99% of surveyed students feeling that staff are experts, or mostly experts within their respective fields (RUSU Survey). As a result, 98% of the students surveyed also felt that the research shared in their classes was relevant to their learning, with 84% agreeing that their learning was often or sometimes linked to relevant professional practice and employment (RUSU Survey). Teaching at the University is also augmented by the interlacing of many external professional speakers. Of students surveyed, 73% said their course engaged with relevant employers, contributing to an exceptional academic experience: *“each of them providing interesting viewpoints on the work they do and how it relates to our module.”* (3rd Year Geography student, RUSU Survey).

“Most of my lecturers are either practicing solicitors or barristers so it is evident that they are incredibly knowledgeable in my subject and it almost feels like learning from an employer or colleague as they have received first hand experience so I feel closer to my desired profession.” – 1st Year Law student, RUSU Survey

Outside of external speaker events and guest-professionals within modules, the University has focused on delivering authentic assessment, building skills relevant to professional employment into modules by design and in doing so securing student engagement through the delivery of innovative, rewarding tasks. Two successful examples include the 'Foundations of International Law' module which includes a treaty-negotiation and written exercise, as well as the 'Real Jobs' module in which Typography students undertake projects brought by real employers. Finally, students receive an outstanding academic experience by being able to directly engage with employers at, University organised, tailored and subject-specific careers events. Of 475 undergraduate students surveyed in May 2022, 68.8% were either satisfied or very satisfied with their careers and employability at the University, with a further 25.3% being neither satisfied or dissatisfied (Rebrick data). In 2021-22 the University hosted careers fairs and themed career weeks focusing on themes such as Media, Marketing and Communications. Overall, 1240 students enrolled on themed-career-week sessions delivered by 114 different employers (Careers Report, CoSED).

SE5: Supportive Learning Environment and Academic Support

After four years below the NSS benchmark, in 2022 the percentage of students who were satisfied with the overall Academic Support available at the University rose to 75.6%, surpassing the benchmark by 2pp. Prior to the pandemic, the sector average was holding steady around the 79%

mark, but in 2021 it dropped to 72.3% and only rose by 1.3pp in 2022. In comparison, in 2021, the University's score dropped to 71.3% from 77.9% in 2020, but then recovered by 4.3pp in 2022. The University of Reading has adjusted its academic support provision to suit the post-pandemic world more quickly than average. In addition, in a survey of undergraduate students taken in November-December 2022, only 19% of students who had used academic support services were signposted elsewhere, with the other 81% advising that their school provided its own services. Of the students who had engaged with Academic Support Services, the ratings they gave were positive with 44 students saying services were Outstanding, Very Good, and Good, whereas ten students said they were average. Additionally, our Red Brick research revealed that 91% of mature UG students do not feel their age is a barrier to Academic Support.

"The response of staff was immediate, both from academic support services and when I asked my professors about support." –
1st Year English literature student, RUSU Survey

The student experience of the 2021 graduating class was greatly affected by the pandemic, with the number of students who felt like part of a community in the 2021 NSS data dropping 12.9pp from 2020. In our International Students' Focus Group, a student shared how the pandemic had affected a wide range of aspects of university life including staff engagement with students. In the 2022 NSS, the number of students who agreed to feeling like part of a community rose to 62.7%. Although the figure remains 6.1pp down on 2020, a recovery of nearly 50% of what was lost the previous year is a positive step forwards. In our recent survey, targeting students from Black and ethnic minority backgrounds, a student said of the community at the University: *"The community is very strong and people are generally nice."* (3rd Year Psychology student, RUSU Targeted Survey). Feedback on Academic Tutors is very positive but can vary depending on the staff member. In our International Students' Focus Group, a student advised that whilst they had a great tutor, some of their friends had not been so lucky or had a frequent turnover of tutors. The RUSU Survey backed this up, with a mix of students praising their academic tutors for their great work in supporting them, whilst others stated that they were not effective. In the 2022 Excellence Awards, students nominated 22 members of staff for the Academic Tutor Excellence Award. Overall, tutors are valuable support for students and those who engage with them report a positive impact.

"My academic tutor [...] invited me to his office and talked with me until I fully understood something." – **1st Year Politics and International Relations student, RUSU Survey**

Statistics show that measures put in place over the pandemic were beneficial to students traditionally affected by the Awarding Gap. In the 2020-21 academic year, the gap between Black students and White students dropped to a low of 7pp vs 20pp in 2018-19 (Access and Participation data). Although the University still needs to do more to address this gap, this is good progress. Throughout the pandemic, revised University assessment and examination processes allowed students to complete exams online over a twenty-three-hour period (allowing for breaks as well as more flexibility). In January 2022, as part of their strategy for closing the Awarding Gap, the University began hiring students as paid Inclusion Consultants. This is a flexible position allowing students to fit it around study. Extensive training and support are given, with student wellbeing a priority. Students can also apply to be a STaR Mentor, a student volunteer who will help others settle in to their first year and help them have the best start at University. Additionally, eight departments run the Peer-assisted Learning

(PAL) scheme, which allows students on difficult modules to benefit from the experience of peers who have already passed. PAL has helped students to gain study skills, improve exam techniques and improve coursework as well as presentations. The University also provides an array of support for disabled students, having an excellent Disability Advisory Service (DAS) who contact students ahead of their studies to ensure a smooth transition into university life. The success of this service is reflected in University's negative awarding gap, which sat at 2pp in 2018-19, but has since dropped in 2019-20 to -1pp, dropping again to -3pp in 2020-21. Overall, the University dedicates strong resource to disabled students, with specific funding being made available. Additionally, the University employs postgraduate students to assist some DAS registered students on academic studying and planning.

SE6: Physical and Virtual Learning Resources

Over the last five years, student satisfaction, with the provision of physical and virtual learning resources, has remained below the NSS benchmark. However, it has seen a significant improvement with the NSS data showing a steady climb in overall satisfaction with learning resources from 75.3% of registered students in 2019 (vs a sector average of 86.2%) to 80.4% in 2020 (vs a sector average of 86.2%). The return to campus brought a brief slump to 70.8% in 2021 (vs a sector average of 72.6%) followed by a resurgence to 79.6% in 2022 (vs the sector average of 81.6%). Notably, satisfaction with learning resources has dropped significantly across the sector following the pandemic. Between 2020 and 2021 the benchmark dropped 13.6pp and the 2022 sector average remains 4.6pp down on the 2018 sector average – so the fact that Reading managed to improve their score over the course of 2022 is positive by comparison. The University of Reading may have lower satisfaction in learning resources, but it has done a better job of maintaining that satisfaction than the sector at large. Our RUSU Survey found that 87% of students felt that their course received adequate resources. 77% of the students who took the survey were first and second years, which may be a positive sign for the future.

Timetabling has been raised as a concern by some students, particularly regarding some lectures being scheduled back-to-back in different buildings. In our Disabled Students' Focus Group, students felt that the DAS could be more involved to ensure the needs of disabled students were always considered. Nonetheless, most students are quite positive about the efficiency of timetabling with Reading scoring 79% on average in the NSS between 2019-2022 in comparison to the sector benchmark average of 76.9%. The current challenges with timetabling are a worked-on compromise to enable each student to experience the wonderful in-person teaching on offer at Reading. Post-pandemic, digital resources are evolving, with YUJA lecture capture being rolled out across 170+ locations on campus. Our research has shown that - whether they prefer in-person or online teaching - students tend to respond positively to recordings of lectures being made available. The improved interface of Blackboard Ultra has also had a positive impact on student experience. Students are overall very positive about the library, with 81% of students rating it 4 or 5 out of 5 in our RUSU Survey. Upgrades have been made to the online library profile and the Talis reading lists. Students in our Disabled Students' Focus Groups also recognised how helpful the library was during lockdown, praising the library website for preventing wasted journeys by advising if books were currently on loan and for being accommodating to international students who had borrowed books and could not return them due to being out of the country during Covid. The main complaint

“Library resources are great, but not enough space in library during the day” – 1st Year Biochemistry student, RUSU Survey

raised about the library is that it is often busy, which demonstrates how useful students find it as a resource.

SE7: University Engagement with Students

In 2022, the NSS score for Student Voice increased to 70.5% from 63.9% a year prior, putting the University of Reading 3.5pp ahead of the NSS benchmark. The University has structures in place, both internal and independent, to allow students to feedback on teaching and learning and to engage in projects with the University. In the 2020-21 academic year, the University began employing student partners who work with academic staff at a departmental level and assist in the development and implementation of School Teaching Enhancement Action Plans. The University also employs Student Panellists, who provide feedback on priorities and projects at an institutional level. Finally, as mentioned above, the University has hired Inclusion Consultants, students from underrepresented groups who prioritise closing the awarding gap by reviewing programmes and identifying areas of additional support. These internal roles have worked to embed the student voice into the University's various projects, pay students for their time and have given a stronger voice to underrepresented groups. It is therefore unsurprising that students are responding more positively to Student voice metrics in both the NSS and Redbrick surveys. Of the 475 students surveyed in May 2022, 61.5% said they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the representation of student views at the University, this is a 13.3% increase in satisfaction from the 627 students surveyed in April 2021 (Redbrick data).

RUSU has around 350+ Course Reps and Senior Reps volunteer each year, most of which are independently elected. Course Reps represent all students on an individual course, whilst Senior Reps represent all students within a school. All Reps are trained by RUSU to gather feedback and represent the wider student voice. The University engages with Reps in several meetings, most commonly at School level through Student Staff Partnership Groups to ensure student feedback is taken onboard and improvements are made. These meetings can be very effective and have, on many programmes, led to continual improvements and focused support for students. Importantly, these Reps will have oversight and a chance to review all University's programmes in 2023, ahead of the University's implementation of its Portfolio Review. Senior Reps have a slightly increased level of engagement, having been paid in the past as Scrutiny Panel Members, reviewing the introduction of new University programmes. Additionally, four undergraduate Senior Reps are invited each year to sit on University Senate and so comment on core University strategy. However, the partnership around the Rep scheme is not quite as effective as it could be. Miscommunications have arisen around the Senior Rep role, with some Schools seeing the Senior Rep as no more than a manager of Reps, whereas RUSU had introduced the role to have further engagement with Schools and contribute more extensively to projects. There is a feeling that engagement with Senior Reps has taken a backseat comparatively to Student Partners, despite the independent representation Senior Reps bring. Nonetheless, the University has made extensive improvements in embedding student engagement across a range of inputs in the last few years.

“During the pandemic I remember drop-in sessions being really useful. When we mentioned this staff made sure to organise more closer to the exams and made them more interactive” – 3rd Year Law student, RUSU Targeted Survey

Student views are also embedded through the extensive engagement of elected RUSU Full-time Officers and Part-time Officers, who sit on committees and policy groups across the University.

Elected on manifestos tackling student issues and policy improvements, these Officers represent students at Reading and the University makes every effort to engage with them. Working in partnership with academic colleagues, notable achievements in recent years have included: the implementation of a 2-day self-certification exceptional circumstance policy, implemented from 2021 to better support temporarily unwell students; the organisation of a 'relax with RUSU' programme, supporting students throughout their exams in 2022; and most recently, a collaborative 'Cost of Living' task force, reducing costs around campus. Reading students can also get involved in and apply for funding for PLaT (Partnerships in Learning and Teaching) Projects. These are collaborative projects between staff and students and, in recent years, have included research into the experience of disabled students within the School of Law.

SO4: Articulation of Student Outcomes

Whilst each of the University's education gains are clearly set out in its curriculum framework as 'graduate attributes', these gains are not always articulated or communicated to students directly. The majority (76%) of students who completed the RUSU Survey were not fully aware of the gains' existence, with one student stating they were *"not communicated explicitly... a few points are in learning objectives, but it's not explicit."* (RUSU Targeted Survey). However, students who were familiar with them noted that they were aware of them through specific modules and learning objectives. Whilst responses highlight that the overall communication of education gains is weak, they also show that students who do know them, see them as embedded parts of their programme.

SO5 and SO6: Supporting Students to Achieve Gains and Evaluating Gains Achieved

When surveyed, 75% of 2022-23 Course Reps (who responded) answered 'Yes' the University had supported students effectively in helping them to achieve graduate attributes. 31% of these students also agreed that support was 'tailored and effective' (Course Rep flash survey, 2023), and students were able to identify how they have developed these attributes through their learning.

Mastery of the discipline

Programmes at the University are designed to equip each student with the knowledge to enable them to acquire a comprehensive, but personal understanding of how their discipline relates to both academic and real-world contexts. Learning is also scaffolded to provide a logical development of skills to complement study and aid progression. The

"Each of my modules flow from one another... they create a clear landscape of legal study and practise." – 3rd Year Law student, RUSU Targeted Survey

University effectively demonstrates how disciplines relate to industry through the incorporation of external speakers within specific modules and subject-specific careers fairs where students can interact with local, national and international employers. Students benefit from the range of themed career fairs, all of which operated virtually throughout the Covid-19 lockdowns. From Science, Health and Environment focused fairs to more general Graduate Recruitment fairs, 9500+ students have enrolled to attend fairs organised by the Careers team (from 2019-20 to 2021-22) and many students have taken advantage of one-to-one chats with employers (Careers Report, CoSED).

Skills in research and enquiry

Students at Reading are encouraged and supported to enhance their research skills throughout their study through suggested further reading in specific modules and by undertaking supervised research

projects and dissertations. Additionally, these research opportunities are backed by members of academic staff, who can assist students in navigating their relevant discipline. When asked whether lectures and other academic staff were experts in their field, 72% of surveyed students agreed, whilst a further 27% felt that this was mostly true (RUSU Survey). This expertise is reflected throughout student comments, especially when regarding reading lists and academic resources: *'My course is probably the best for research professionals, I never feel as if I don't have the resources I need'* (3rd Year Archaeology and History student, RUSU Survey).

Outside of its degree programmes, the University also runs a successful Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme (UROP) in which approximately 275 second-year students have been supported and paid to continue developing their skills in research since the 2020-21 academic year. UROP placements offer a chance for students to explore different disciplines and in some instances, students have been listed as co-authors of journal articles. Student accounts of UROP are very positive. Whilst UROP placements are limited to second-year students, the University has also recently began working in collaboration with RUSU on widening research opportunities to other undergraduate years. The upcoming Reading University Student Sustainability Summit, scheduled in March 2023, will offer all students an additional opportunity to undertake and present research linked to sustainability, followed by the publication of research.

"The UROP experience has... given me more time in the lab which I have lost due to COVID. I've gained more understanding of how research is undertaken in a chemistry department and understanding of my potential next steps after I have finished my degree." – 2nd Year Chemistry Student, UROP Data

Personal effectiveness

The University seeks to instil in students with values of self-efficacy, resilience, intellectual curiosity and the ability to communicate and reflect upon learning. Many of these skills and values are built right from the start of programmes through skills-focused modules. For example, the 'Legal Skills' (LLB Law), 'Applied and Professional Psychology' (BSc Psychology) and 'Research Skills and Opportunities in History' (BA History) modules are all especially focused on equipping students with the skills they need to be effective learners within their specific subjects at university and within professional contexts beyond. The scope for integrating personal discipline-specific interests is also effective amongst students: *'in one of my modules... you write reflective journals and make a presentation about something you are passionate about so that you can confront the material instead of writing an impersonal report'* (3rd Year Psychology student, RUSU Targeted Survey).

"Working as a treasurer has boosted my confidence in talking to people and I am able to demonstrate financial management" - 3rd Year Business and Management student, RUSU Targeted Survey

Students are also supported in the development of personal effectiveness outside of their modules, most obviously through the University's Careers team. Outside of providing career plans, applications and professional development, the RED Award supports students in improving their employability and general skills progression. This is done through mapping training sessions, internships and volunteering opportunities available to students and then planning reflection upon these experiences. In this way, the RED Award also maps to the different activities and voluntary roles RUSU offers to students, such as 350+ RUSU Academic Reps and 100+ RUSU Sports Clubs and Societies, each

with its own committee made up of student volunteers. A vast number of students have taken part in extracurricular training and voluntary positions of responsibility between 2018 and 2023. Through volunteering, collecting feedback, representing peers at committee meetings and running societies, students receive training, broaden their experiences and develop skills, including communication and self-efficacy. RUSU has also recently launched the Black Leadership Programme delivered with the support of the University of Reading Careers team. This is a first, collaborative step in targeting groups that may benefit from more focused support in the aim of enhancing skill sets and aiding professional development.

Global engagement and multicultural awareness

A diversity of perspectives and international outlooks are embedded within the curriculum to support students to become interculturally competent. Although this may not be the case in every module, the University is gradually making content and reading lists more diverse. For example, through the production of resources focusing on decolonising the

“Decolonising the curriculum is definitely on many students minds and has been talked about as part of lectures” –

student, Home Students’ Focus Group

curriculum and creation of small pots of designated funding for enhancing teaching and learning in PLaNT projects, students are also supported in gaining a diversity of perspectives and global outlook as these values are built into a breadth of modules: *“My degree has lots of modules that are internationally focused... from Global Justice, to Chinese Philosophy, I feel I have gained a good global outlook”* (3rd Year Ethics, Value and Philosophy student, RUSU Targeted survey). As of 2022, the RED Global Engagement Award has also been introduced to complement curricular learning by rewarding students for gaining cultural awareness and engaging in globally-focused work.

The University of Reading also benefits from a large, culturally diverse international student body, with roughly 23% of students holding international fee status. In supporting students' multicultural awareness, RUSU is home to 35+ different culture and faith groups which it brings together every year in a cultural showcase to celebrate diversity. In addition to the showcase, 2022 marked the launch of the Black Art Showcase in which students came together to celebrate

“I am introduced to a new perspective, at least every other lecture” –

student, Disabled Students’ Focus Group

Black students and their individual cultures. The University also runs a wide array of lectures and events that focus on social issues and sustainability, and that celebrate diversity. These events permeate many different groups and levels of the University, ranging from university-wide celebrations, such as the most recent Green Festival (November, 2022), to departmental events, such as the International Women’s Day mini-staff and student conference, hosted by the Law School. Key to these events is that they are often held in partnership with students and so are beneficial in supporting students to engage in developing as global citizens. With certain Schools running these types of events regularly, there is certainly an appetite amongst students for more departments to expand their offering.

Summary

In summary, the University of Reading provides a very good student experience, excellent student outcomes and has made great improvements across the board. While challenges remain in areas such as student voice and assessment, these are being addressed in partnership with RUSU.