



## **SEC16D015**

**Title:** uea|su Student Experience Report 2016  
**Author:** Students' Union  
**Date:** November 2016  
**Circulation:** Student Experience Committee 24<sup>th</sup> November 2016  
**Agenda:** A5  
**Version:** Final  
**Status:** Open – such papers are printed on white paper, will appear on the Committee Office website and be accessible to anyone with internet access. This includes other HEIs, members of the public, students etc.

---

### **Issue**

Each year the Students' Union produces a summary report on research into the student experience and issues/recommendations arising from it.

### **Recommendation**

A series of recommendations are included throughout the report.

### **Risk Implications**

Medium: There are risks to UEA's reputation and league table position if issues within re not acted on.

### **Equality and Diversity**

Several sections directly address E&D issues.

### **Timing of decisions**

A formal University response to the recommendations will be developed in time for the next meeting of SEC in February.

### **Further Information**

This year's report includes PG and UG issues. A separate international students' experience report will follow in the new year.

### **Background**

It has previously been resolved that the SU will annually produce a report to be considered by this body.

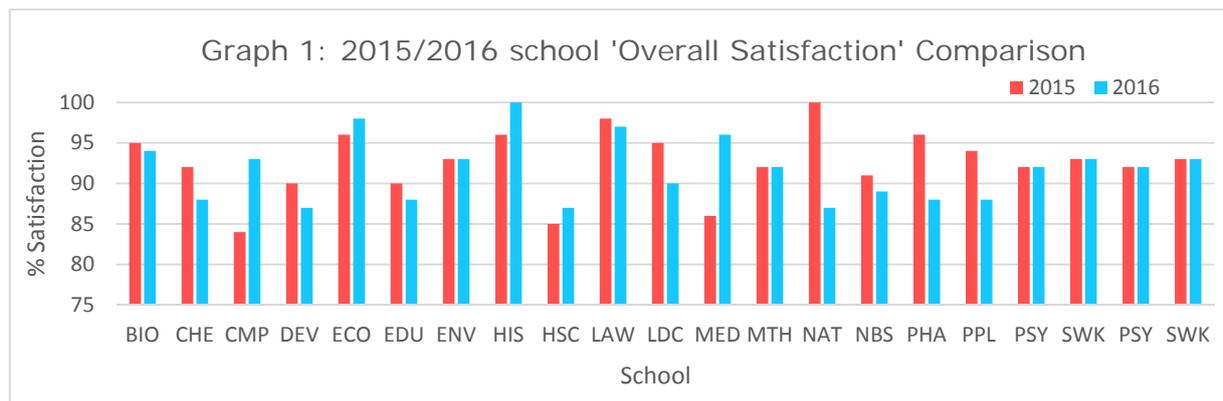
## Introduction

1. This report was authored by the Campaigns and Policy Team at uea|su. It brings together the most recent research on the student experience in 2016.
2. This report draws upon a large range of data from the uea|su Students' Union Survey (SUS) 2016, the National Student Survey (NSS) 2016<sup>1</sup>, the UEA Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (UEA PTES) 2016<sup>2</sup>, the UEA Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (UEA PRES) 2015<sup>3</sup>, uea|su's Light Up Campus Survey 2015, and uea|su's weekly Quality Conversation (QC) Surveys to try to build the most accurate picture of the Student Experience at UEA in 2016.
3. We have focused on 6 key themes that emerged from the data in this report.
4. Across those these we have identified 34 recommendations for the University to implement in order to continue improving the experience of the student population at UEA.
5. The aim of this report is to highlight the most important and current concerns of both undergraduate and postgraduate students.
6. This report does not seek to simply 'problematise' areas needing improvement but to offer recommendations to help provide real solutions to help improve students' overall experience as a student at the university.

## Context

UEA's overall undergraduate student satisfaction, while still high, decreased by 1% from last year to 91% and it is clear when looking at UEA's different schools that the majority did less well than they had done in the previous year, contributing to the overall 1% decline.

Since 2013 however the university has not improved in overall satisfaction, seeing a 2% decline during this time period. A general decline in satisfaction is evident throughout this report, with the exception of 'learning resources' which has not only high satisfaction but also has stayed the same since last year, and 'Assessment and feedback', which saw a 2% increase, but is the lowest scoring theme in NSS data.



<sup>1</sup> The National Student Survey is distributed annual to final-year undergraduate students in the UK. In 2016, 1987 final-year undergraduates from UEA completed the NSS 2016, with a response rate of 68 per cent. This is important consider during our discussion of the data from NSS.

<sup>2</sup> The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) is distributed to all students undertaking a taught post-graduate certificate in the UK. In 2016, 40% of postgraduate taught students at UEA completed the PTES. Although this is less than the response rate for the NSS, this figure is almost double UEA's response rate for the 2014 PTES.

<sup>3</sup> The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) takes place every other year, the last survey being in 2015. It is distributed to all students in the UK undertaking a postgraduate research qualification. It achieved a response rate of 58% in 2015, compared to 31% in 2013.

It is important to keep in mind during this report that even in cases where the university is doing well, there is always ways to improve and when considering the NSS qualitative data, students raise a number of important concerns which need to be addressed.

The report is broken down based on themes that the SU feels is important to discuss, and while some may be in line with the NSS themes, we have included additional sections as deemed appropriate based on our own research that has been conducted.



Theo Antonio-Phillips, UG Education Officer



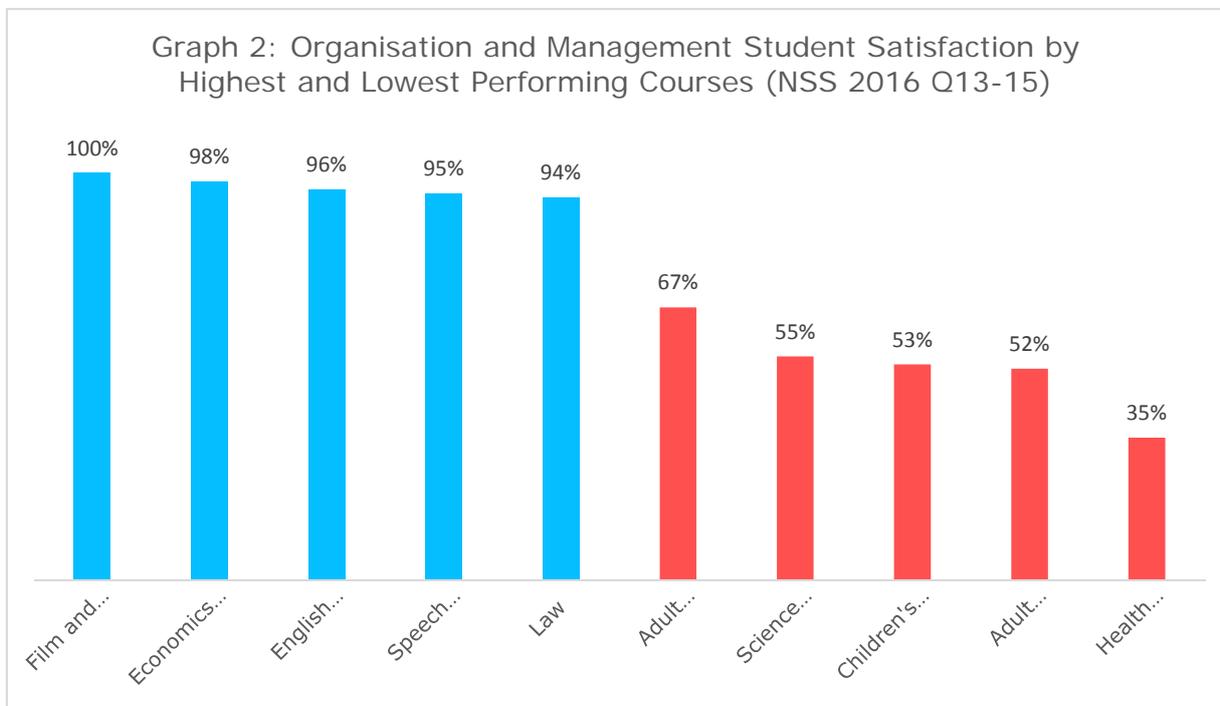
Madeleine Colledge, PG Education Officer

## Section 1: Organisation and Management

Problems with organisation and management of classes can lead to unnecessary stress, impacting on students' overall wellbeing, and can inhibit proper learning. While the NSS results showed that 82% of students were satisfied with the university's level of organisation and management, large disparities remain among different courses and schools, suggesting that UEA struggles with a consistent approach.

Given that this is the second lowest score among the 7 NSS themes, that the university has seen a 2% drop in satisfaction from last year, and that there has been a consistent drop since 2013- there is still considerable room for improvement. It is worthwhile mentioning that while the whole university sees a decline in satisfaction, SWK has seen an incredible improvement within this theme, where in 2015 only half of the students were satisfied compared to 80% in 2016, meaning that changes are well within the university's capability.

It is clear from this graph that the cause for such large disparities must be specific issues affecting only certain programmes or schools otherwise data would be much more consistent among programmes. That said, four of the 5 lowest scores for 'Organisation and Management' lie within The Faculty of Health and



Medicine and more specifically, Health Sciences. All of these courses are very placement-heavy, highlighting that the organisation of placements in particular may be what these students feel is particularly poor. We therefore next focus on placement provision.

### Placements

As mentioned, it is interesting to note that, overall, programmes which offer placements tend to rate lower satisfaction in this theme compared to those which do not, most of which lie within the Faculty of Health and Medicine:

*"The placements in the penultimate year could sometimes have no patients, but I had to stay for the full shift; it was not too bad for me, but others had to travel a long way and then sit around for 5 hours"* Medicine, FMH, NSS 2016

*“Some poor organisation around placements. Overall satisfied with variety of placement opportunities, but unsatisfied that offered opportunity to request placements and then not given opportunity to attend these placements. Would be more sensible to not offer opportunity to request”* Mental Health Nursing Undergraduate, HSC, NSS 2016

*“Some placements are brilliant. Others are not. It's a lottery”* Adult Nursing Undergraduate, HSC, NSS 2016  
*“One particular placement had too many students in that placement area. When I was allocated my placement on the delivery suite, there were too many students allocated on shift with me, which meant that I didn't get the required amount of births to qualify for the course so I might have to go back and spend more time there. So there would be five students trying to get the births, some shifts I would get no births”* Midwifery Undergraduate, HSC, NSS 2016

*“Placements a lot of the time felt unorganised with some areas not even expecting students when contacted”* Mental Health Nursing Undergraduate, HSC, NSS 2016

*“At times, it has been unorganised in terms of the timetable and finding where placements are far enough in advance”* Adult Nursing Undergraduate, HSC, NSS 2016

As clearly shown from the above comments, students feel there are numerous organisational and management issues relating to placements, beginning with the allocation of their placements and continuing throughout the placement itself. In fact, problems with placements are not contained within this theme and a number of other issues have also been raised which will be discussed throughout other subsections of this report.

That said, many courses require a huge proportion of student time to be spent out on placement and, as such, schools should have appropriate staff resources to accommodate this.

### Timetabling

A number of students from different programmes reported in the NSS that they are not happy with the organisation of their class schedule. There are extremes of circumstance, with some courses students having consecutive hours of class on the same day, and some having very few classes spread across several days. This can create either incredibly stressful days where students have no time to reflect on their teaching, or mean that students have to spend large amounts of money and time over the week getting onto campus to attend classes.

*“The essay deadline can sometimes be problematic when several essays are due for submission around the same time. The scheduling of some seminars has been problematic. As a mature student, I have to balance study and family life, where sometimes things cannot be avoided. This can result in missed seminars which impacts on the knowledge I have been able to acquire. I feel that this can and does put me at a disadvantage when completing summative work as there are gaps in my study.”* Undergraduate, AMA, NSS 2016

*“Deadlines for completion of work around school holidays which is difficult if you have children.”* Social Work Undergraduate, SWK, NSS 2016

*“Bunching together of exams was a problem, having 5 exams in 8 days was unfair and stressful compared to other timetables.”* Undergraduate, NBS, NSS 2016

*“Timetable is bad. In for one or two hours each day, would rather have it covered over a few days. Exam timetables are dreadful. Have a whole month where exams could be set but seem to be over three days. Exam timetables are dreadful, have a whole month where exams could be set but seem to be over three days.”* Economics Undergraduate, ECO, NSS 2016

Separately, students have also commented on the timetabling of their exams and assignments. Here also, students find that they have multiple same-day deadlines or deadlines which are very close together. Now more than ever, students are taking on more responsibility. This may be part-time work, joining clubs and

societies, and particularly for mature students having additional work and family commitments. Proper organisation and management of class can greatly help create a positive university experience by allowing them to better manage their time, which also results in better learning.

*"Sometimes lectures placed at inconvenient times, e.g. 4 hours in a row 1-5 on a Friday in same topic, no hours previous day."* Undergraduate, DEV, NSS 2016

*"I feel like more effort could have been made to allow student athletes to compete in their sports more easily. This was a battle in terms of seminars and lectures on Wednesdays with lecturers reluctant to allow people out of class even when they had promised to catch up."*

International Development Undergraduate, DEV, NSS 2016

*"2nd year is the hardest year of the degree and because I work better when important and lengthy assignments/deadlines are spread out, I found that I had very little time to do other extracurricular activities, which would have definitely been hugely beneficial for my studies."*

Undergraduate, PSY, NSS 2016

As expected, poor timetabling also has a knock-on effect on students' travel time, a concern raised by a number of students:

*"There seemed to be an unfair distribution of placement locations. I personally had to travel to King's Lynn Hospital every year of the course, yet some people only had one placement there. A better system is required."* Medicine, FMH, NSS 2016

*"I have felt that timetables are impractical for home students, as I often have to travel two hours*

*for a fifty-minute lecture or seminar."* Accounting and Finance Undergraduate, NBS, NSS 2016

*"In regards to lectures awkward times for people that commute."* Economics Undergraduate, ECO, NSS 2016

We have also been made aware of the fact that there are many instances of evenings and Wednesday afternoons being used for teaching, contradicting UEA's expectation to ensure that teaching is as accessible as possible.

*"Where certain seminars are only held on one day of the week, for example this year a lot was held only on a Monday, which meant that I had 4 of my 6 seminars on one Monday where I also had sporting commitments in the evening, which made it very overwhelming at times."* Undergraduate, NBS, NSS 2016

*"Timetable not very good, sometimes very late lectures in the evening, which makes it very hard to concentrate"* Undergraduate, LAW, NSS 2016

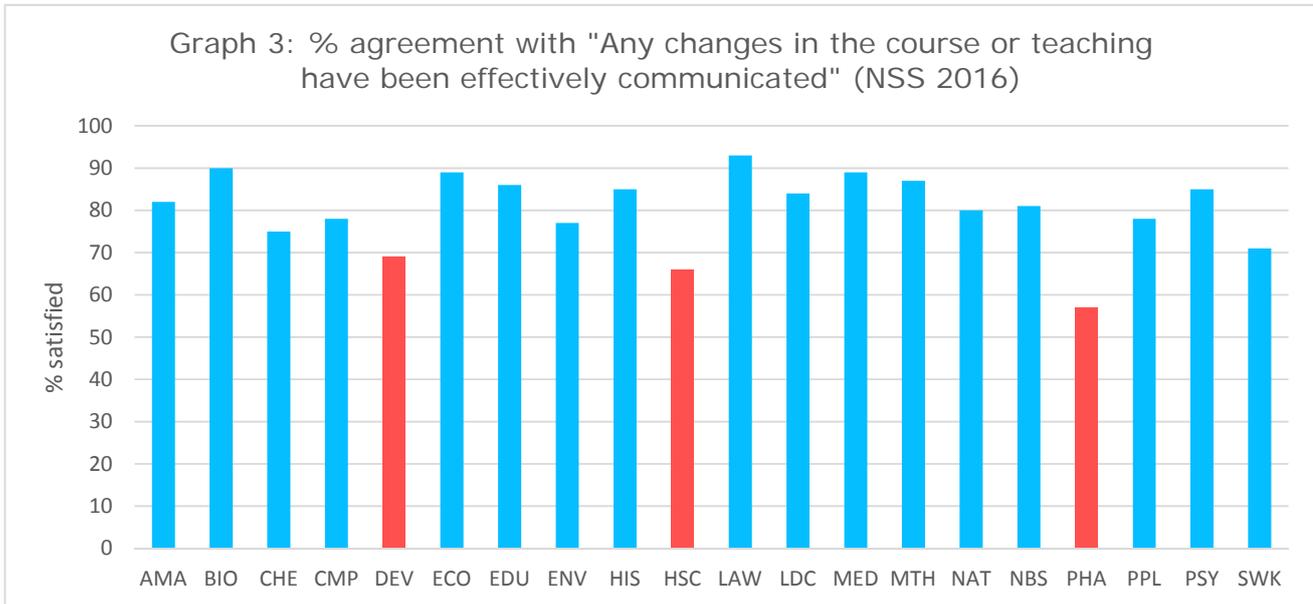
*"I feel like more effort could have been made to allow student athletes to compete in their sports more easily. This was a battle in terms of seminars and lectures on Wednesdays with lecturers reluctant to allow people out of class even when they had promised to catch up."* Undergraduate, DEV, NSS 2016

*"There was no time on Wednesday afternoons to do sports like all of the other courses which made me miss out on joining other societies and making further friends."* Undergraduate,

HSC, NSS 2016

## Communication

Poor communication was another big concern of students across faculties resulting in overall poor organisation. Last minute changes in course content and structure meant students were given very little time to organise their own schedule, often resulting in conflicting or stressful deadlines.



The graph above indicates students' satisfaction with communication from their school about changes in the course or teaching. Those schools highlighted in pink have particularly low results, with only just over half of PHA students satisfied with communication. There is great fluctuation across the institution, indicating that communication is very much a school-specific issue rather than something that is institutional.

The most common type of miscommunication was last minute class cancellation often resulting in students coming in to class when it had been cancelled, causing a waste of travel time and costs.

*"Some aspects of the course have been disorganised especially when there is a change to lecture times or cancelled lectures and the cohort have not been made aware of the changes on time"* Adult Nursing, HSC, NSS 2016

*"Our exam timetables in 2nd year could have been dealt with in a more timely fashion, we were told really late into the spring semester that we were going to have earlier exams (about 3 weeks early) and this clashed with coursework deadlines."* Undergraduate, PSY, NSS 2016

*"Sometimes things aren't clearly communicated, such as last minute room changes."* History Undergraduate, HIS, NSS

*"There have been not communicated changes to coursework"* Education Undergraduate, EDU, NSS 2016

*"Last minute exam timetable changes"* Psychology Undergraduate, PSY, NSS 2016

*"The course structure wasn't really good. There were a few changes made which weren't communicated well."* Pharmacy Integrated Masters, PHA, NSS 2016

In the context of undergraduate students' third highest concern being money<sup>4</sup>, and with a growing number of students commuting in to save money, last minute changes and cancellations resulting in wasted time and money are not acceptable.

<sup>4</sup> Data from SUS 2016.

## Learning and Teaching Hubs

The three learning and teaching hubs across the university provide general management and support for students. Undergraduate students rely heavily on the hub's services continuously throughout the year and so, it is concerning that one important qualitative finding is the large number of students who comment negatively on their respective school hub. Negative comments cut across departments and faculties, although in some cases, the type of complaint differs and appears to be programme or department specific.

### **i. Moving Hubs**

The university's decision to move one of the hubs from the Edith Cavell Building onto main campus has been negatively received by a number of students who are primarily based at ECB. The overwhelming view is that this decision was made without student consultation and as a result students are unhappy with the decision as it impacts negatively on their ability to access hub services.

*"The hub has moved from the ECB Building to main campus these causes' logistical difficulties in submitting work, obtaining necessary forms, seeking appropriate admin support from staff. It has also caused delays in receiving feedback from our work and I believe our assessment of practice documents have not been properly processed due to these same logistical difficulties. This has been frustrating for students."* Adult Nursing (Jan intake), EFRY hub, NSS 2016

*"The hub being moved was inconvenient especially with hand in deadlines and having to leave the building and head over to campus during lunch breaks."* Adult Nursing (Sept intake), EFRY Hub, NSS 2016

*"The hub has moved away from the main nursing building which makes achieving some hand- in deadlines difficult, particularly when timetabled in 9-5 at Edith Cavell. I don't think I've talked to one person who's happy with the hub being moved to campus and it seems like another decision someone has made without actually considering the impact on students and staff."* Mental Health Nursing, Sept intake, EFRY hub, NSS 2016

*"The hub being moved on to campus was another physical aspect of university that made more challenging than necessary. This made it difficult to hand in assignments on time due to being in lectures at ECB away from the hub on campus a difficulty not faced by other university students."* Children's Nursing, Sept intake, EFRY hub, NSS 2016

*"Our hub was moved without the consultation of all students. Most of us felt that moving the hub into campus was not beneficial yet it went ahead anyway. Moving the hub into campus has made it difficult to submit or collect assessments whilst we're in our main building for lectures."* Children's Nursing, Sept intake, EFRY hub, NSS 2016

From these comments, it is clear that having to travel to the main campus to access the hub creates a number of logistical difficulties and added stress for students. When students have busy class or placement schedules away from the main campus, it becomes very difficult to manage their day to allow enough time to go to the hub.

This means that for many students, the only time they can visit the hub is during their lunch break, which they should not have to do. In addition, having to submit coursework is always a stressful time, the hub move makes handing in course work even more stressful and as one student states, it also creates delays in receiving feedback and processing paperwork in a timely manner. It is important to keep in mind that for many students, the hub move was the only concern raised which shows that this is an issue which strongly affects students.

### **ii. Communication and organisation**

Another issue students' highlight is the lack of communication and organisation in the hubs. For many students this results in misinformation, taking a long time to reply to online queries, delays in work being returned, exam and class timetables being issued late or incorrect or changed, and generally finding it difficult to receive the support that they need throughout their studies. This of course has an overall impact on students' educational experience. Many if not all students, use the hub(s) as a main port of contact for

a wide range of important issues - proper communication and organisation can go a long way to make students feel that their issues are important to the university.

*"The negative aspect of my course is the lack of communication and effectiveness in the Arts Hub. I do not feel welcomed when I go to the Arts Hub for administrative issues. All employers except for one have been reluctant to help me with most of my problems."* PPL, Arts hub, NSS, 2016

*"The hub is often really unhelpful and gave me wrong information that has deterred subject choices."* Environmental Science, ZICER hub, NSS 2016

*"The Arts Hub has been a complete nightmare to work with, lack of communication and left bewildered at the start of terms as to what modules I have been moved onto against my wishes. Utterly hopeless."* International Relations and Modern History, Arts hub, NSS 2016

*"The teaching hub for nursing have no understanding that sometimes things in life can interfere with studies and they will not help! The staff really need to learn to communicate better."* Adult Nursing, Sept intake, EFRY hub, NSS 2016

*"The way that HUB works is just awful, they have done so many mistakes not only with me, but with my course mates too"* CHE, ZICER hub, NSS 2016

*"The arts hub has a huge number of issues ranging from problems with creating student timetables, late and often, wrong exam timetables with exams being forgotten and poor communication internally and with students."* Law, Arts hub, NSS 2016

*"I think the most negative experience has been the hub. The staff don't seem to know what they are doing and the hub is very slow."* History, Arts hub, NSS 2016

*"The hub struggle to give prompt replies in emails and don't process forms quickly. I've had to regularly re-send emails in order to finally receive replies."* Environmental Science, ZICER hub, NSS 2016

*"The HSC hub is unhelpful... They do not know the answers to questions, or give conflicting advice to what lecturers say, leaving students not knowing who is right! Little thought is given to how actions of the school will affect students, and when concerns are voiced, nothing is done to support us or show empathy."* Adult Nursing, Sept intake, EFRY hub, NSS 2016

It is clear from these comments that students are frustrated and upset about the way the hub is run. Addressing these issues require a multi-pronged approach which include not only changes made within the hub but also better dissemination of information to students so that they are aware of the type of queries the hub is can best address and are responsible for including a knowledge of the wide range of services the university offers outside of their hubs. Ultimately this can contribute to better general management of queries.

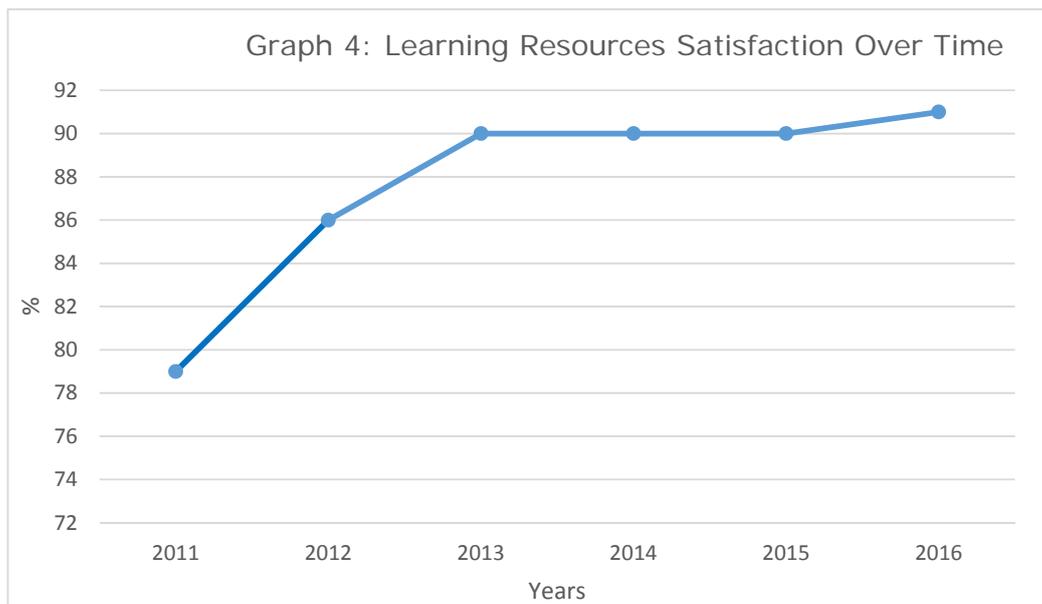
**Recommendations: Organisation and Management**

1. A consistency and standards review should be carried out across hubs, to include an audit of the training and support for staff in all 3 hubs. The review should include work across Student Support Services, uea|su and the hubs themselves to ensure that there is consistency and shared information when signposting students.
2. Schools with satisfaction levels below 80% satisfaction for communication should be caused to investigate this and report back on their findings and actions.
3. UEA should commit to working towards a student-centred timetabling system which allows for students to more easily plan ahead and balance commitments. Examples of action within such an approach could include timetables being released at least 2 weeks prior to the start of each semester and/or to have the dates and times of modules confirmed when students make their module choices.
4. In an any event to develop systems to urgently eradicate “back to back” lectures on different sides of campus.
5. UEA’s Business Intelligence Unit and uea|su should carry out a joint project on examining the experience of students with caring responsibilities to identify potential barriers based around current O&M practice.
6. UEA and uea|su will be carrying out joint investigations into HSC placements to establish students’ expectations, realities, recommendations to improve the placement experience.

## Section 2: Resources

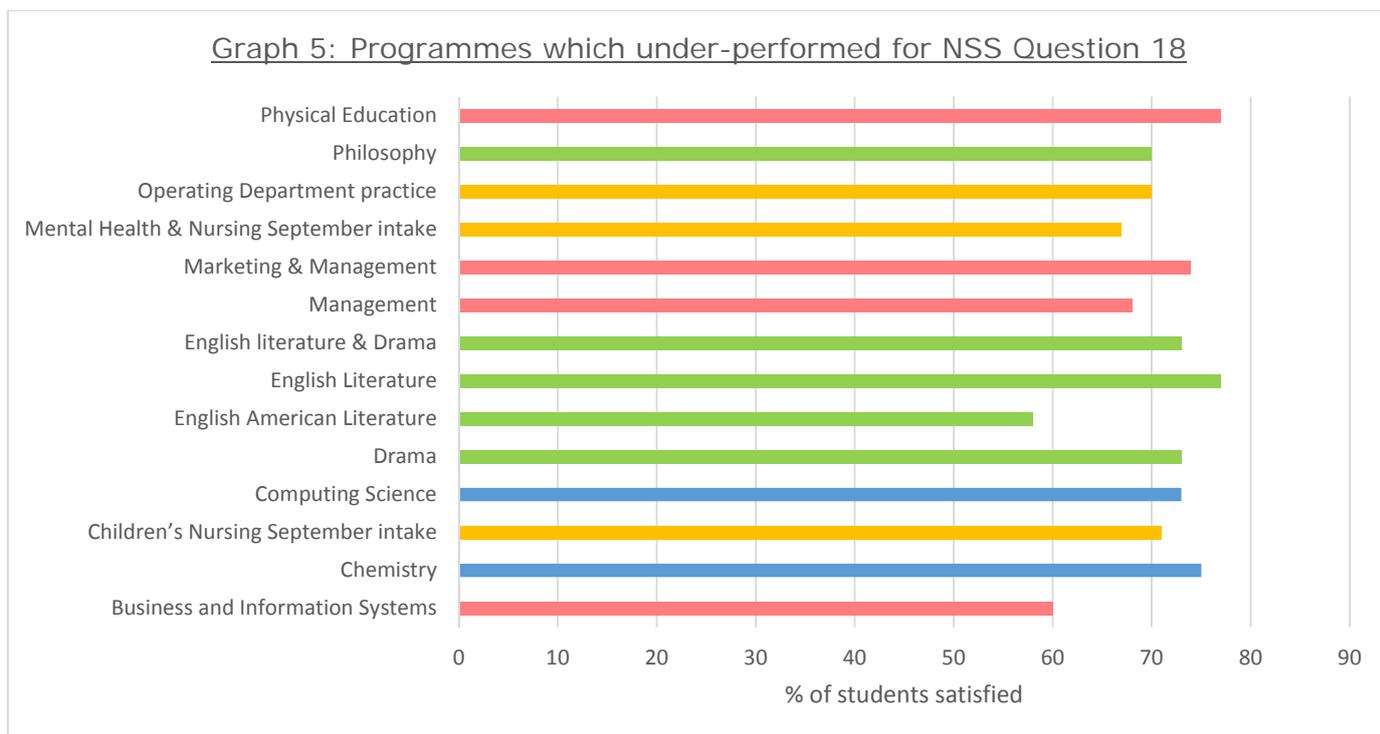
### Learning Resources and Facilities

Across all programmes, students are highly satisfied with the university's accessibility and availability of learning resources and unsurprisingly with 91% satisfaction, the university ranks in the top 10% of institutions for the past two years and since 2011 has seen a 12% improvement. Looking more closely within departments and programmes it is evident that even though some are faring less well than others these gaps are very small. This is good news and means the university is generally consistent in providing good learning resources, which is paramount for students to be able to succeed in their course work.



Despite great scores, students are telling us that improvements are still needed. For example, within the NSS 'Learning Resources' theme, Question 18 ('I have been able to access specialised equipment, facilities of rooms when I needed to') ranks the lowest in satisfaction (86%) compared to other two questions asked in this theme (both at 93%). This is most likely because students from specific courses have given much lower satisfaction ratings which lowers the overall average for the question.

Graph 5: Programmes which under-performed for NSS Question 18



**Social Sciences Faculty**  
**Science Faculty**

**Arts and Humanities Faculty**  
**Faculty of Health and Medicine**

Due to lack of substantial qualitative data by students from these programmes, no in-depth conclusions can be drawn which explain for such discrepancies. Regardless of their cause(s), this finding shows that despite overall high satisfaction there are still courses with more than 20% of students dissatisfied. Given that students from the programmes mentioned above are much less satisfied than the rest of the student population average for Q18, further investigation is needed to properly and effectively address their concerns.

It also shows that issues are not defined to particular Faculties, given that there is a relatively even spread across all four Faculties.

### Computers and Library Capacity

Among the NSS qualitative data provided, it is evident that students feel that there aren't enough computers available across the campus, and especially the library, and a number of students have noticed that this becomes a bigger problem during peak times, such as specific times during the day and more generally during exam time. In addition to lack of computer stations, students also feel that there needs to be more study space in the library.

*"There is no space in the IT/library, and means it's hard to find anywhere to study during exam season."* Law Undergraduate, LAW, NSS 2016

*"During exam/busy periods, it has been difficult to get a seat in the library and there needs to be more group study space as there is only one small space for this or rooms that are continuously booked out. Computer facilities are poor, very slow computers."* Mathematics Undergraduate, MTH, NSS 2016

*"There isn't enough space in the library, bad air and lack of books in the required reading."* International Relations and Politics Undergraduate, PPL, NSS 2016

*"I feel there could be a larger number of computers in the library for use, or placed elsewhere."* English Literature with Creative Writing Undergraduate, LDC, NSS 2016

*"Sometimes the library is just too full; ideally, it should have more seated spaces and more computers available. Students need to be made more aware of various IT places they can work in the university as this has not been clear and has only been discovered by word of mouth."* Undergraduate, DEV, NSS 2016

It is important to keep in mind that students constantly rely on computers and learning spaces throughout the year and when they struggle to find an adequate place to study, it can severely hinder their learning.

*"I have been without a laptop this term and have often struggled to find a free computer in the library."*

English Literature Undergraduate, LDC, NSS 2016

*"IT resources are difficult to use within the school and library, computers or rooms often being full or booked out. Not all students have access to their own laptops/iPads, particularly those financially strapped e.g., single parents or those with spouses on minimum wages who may have 1 family computer in the home environment. This can make studying/research at Uni very difficult if not impossible at times. Maybe some type of laptop monthly 'rental' service could be offered by the Uni for the period of the degree to those with financial constraints?"*

Occupational Therapy Undergraduate, HSC, NSS 2016

The SU is, however, aware of the library's limits in terms of the building being listed and their consequential plans to introduce rolling stacks to certain floors to allow for more learning spaces. This said, we feel it is vital that the University invests in creating additional learning spaces both on a temporary and long term basis: with the increase of 500 students per year, extra space on one floor of the library is not going to be sufficient to cater to the needs of UEA's growing population.

### Printing Costs

Many students feel the burden of printing costs, particularly those studying on courses with which have a lot of reading literature. When added alongside high tuition fees, cost of living, text book fees, and other university-related expenses, printing costs can be seen as another added expense which puts an additional unnecessary strain on students. In light of the fact that only some schools provide printing allowances, which technically they shouldn't be doing anyway, it is understandable that students will feel frustrated about paying such high costs.

*"Although the rest of the library resources are more than adequate, printing costs are far too high."* English Literature Undergraduate, LDC, NSS 2016

*"There could be changes made to the resources in the library such as printing costs."* History

Undergraduate, HIS, NSS 2016

*"Free printing should be available."* History Undergraduate, HIS, NSS 2016

*"The course doesn't come with a printing allowance yet other schools at UEA provide one."* Law

Undergraduate, LAW, NSS 2016

*"Removal of printing credits within our last year, has led to students not printing out all resources, as some students can't afford to. It would be helpful if the university helped with this, even if it's just helping us printing lecture notes."* Pharmacy Integrated Masters, PHA, NSS 2016

As a result of this feedback, uea|su now has a printer available for students to use free of charge. It isn't, however, usable for formal assignment hand-ins due to it being funded by advertising printed on the paper. We would strongly urge the University to consider the printing provisions for students; especially when large submissions must be turned in by hand. It is vital that this is a consistent approach across the institution and is not different on a school-by-school basis.

### Growing Student Population: stretch on resources

Many concerns about learning resources and facilities can be linked to the growing student population at UEA: and it is telling that students are picking up on this.

*“The growing number of students is putting a heavy strain on the amount of resources and staff time available to each student. This has not affected the quality of my education, but has required complicated logistics and resulted in overworked staff.”* Undergraduate, LDC, NSS 2016

*“They could have made more study rooms available. Sometimes we couldn’t find places to do our stuff in.”* Business Finance and Economics Undergraduate, NBS, NSS 2016

*“Need bigger facilities as the department grows.”* Drama Undergraduate, LDC, NSS 2016

*“While when I first started at UEA I was very impressed with the facilities, as time has gone on here the population of the university has seemed to increase dramatically and the facilities on campus have not grown in order to be able to accommodate the increase in population. The library and gym are the two most obvious areas where the quality has dramatically decreased, with both places being constantly over-crowded and not conducive to a working environment.”*

Undergraduate, DEV, NSS 2016

*“Demand for particular books in the library is very high & there are not always enough copies of particular medical/A&P/Allied health books in the library”* Occupational Therapy Undergraduate, HSC, NSS 2016

Whilst the University are expanding their student accommodation capacity on campus, the provision of teaching and study spaces is not being expanded at the same rate, resulting in room shortages, inadequate study spaces, and over-crowded lecture theatres. Students are clearly picking up on the fact that resources are stretched now, and are worried about the effect that a further increase in student numbers each year will have.

*“It’s hard to find space and computers in the library at busy times.”* Ecology Undergraduate, BIO, NSS 2016

*“The limited library resources have meant that I have ended up spending a lot of money on books. It would make sense to increase the number of copies of each book so that you don’t have every person fighting for the same book on the same week.”* English and American Literature Undergraduate, LDC, NSS 2016

Undergraduate, LDC, NSS 2016

*“Need more online materials and eBooks.”* History Undergraduate, HIS, NSS 2016

*“Study spaces in library could be quite limited. Also, not enough books or people checking out books that were in high demand for long periods.”* English Literature Undergraduate, LDC, NSS 2016

*“Throughout my degree, I have had issues with library search. Sometimes, books that the library does have do not immediately appear on the search and, other times, the search will produce results for articles but then I will log in to find the university does not have a subscription to that journal.”* History Undergraduate, HIS, NSS 2016

The growing student population has a negative impact on the provision of library resources and study spaces in particular, especially when the library resources do not adequately accommodate the number of students enrolled on modules. It is important that the library provides a sufficient number of e-resources for students and that modules are designed with ease of access to resources in mind. Not doing so can significantly increase the cost of living for students, which is already of great concern to many students.

### Issues with Joint Honours

A number of the undergraduate respondents to NSS 2016 highlighted that they were unhappy with the delivery of their Joint Honours degree in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, particularly in AMA, PPL, and HIS. Much of this dissatisfaction was linked to inter-school communication and organization, in addition to general support for students on Joint Honours degrees.

*"The Joint Honours was badly structured."* Undergraduate, PPL, NSS 2016  
*"Limited options for courses to students on my Joint Honours course and often rejected for courses in the Literature Department."* Undergraduate, PPL, NSS 2016  
*"The joint course didn't connect well, would have helped to have more support from the English Department."* Undergraduate, AMA, NSS 2016  
*"As a Joint Honours student, I felt as if there was a lack of communication between the two departments I was studying in."* Undergraduate, HIS, NSS 2016  
*"University took no effort to help Joint Honour students. Even things as simple as receiving emails from schools took weeks before anyone bothered to attempt to figure it out. Three years later, I still don't receive all the information I'm supposed to receive."* Undergraduate, PPL, NSS 2016  
*"There was never a huge amount of varied module choices that you could actually take. For example the list would look great however when it came to take them they were either not running or clashed. It was very difficult to find classes that didn't clash, especially with a joint degree. The main problem I have had here is that despite loving my two chosen subjects (I couldn't wish to have two better subjects) I would have only taken one because the integration between joint degrees is terrible. There was no communication so being enrolled in the school of one subject, but genuinely being a part of two schools equally. Meant I felt like I was only a part of one. We didn't receive any emails or news about anything either course related or social, or when I wanted to know more I was told that was down to my advisor whether I got to get this information. This is absolutely crazy, I have paid to do a joint degree and deserve to receive equal attention and advice from both."* Undergraduate, PPL, NSS 2016

The joint honours undergraduate student above highlight the lack of integration between schools, limited module choice across disciplines, and poor organisation and communication between their two schools of study had made them regret studying on a joint honours degree, and they instead wished that they had taken a single honours course. This student also highlighted that the delivery of their joint honours degree also limited their social opportunities and development, as they were not made aware of *"anything either course related or social"*. This may significantly disadvantage students on joint – or even triple – honours and affect the sense of community and cohesion across schools and disciplines at the University.

In the International Student Experience Report 2015/16 and in the Undergraduate Experience Report 2014, students once again expressed their concerns and dissatisfaction regarding the Joint and Triple Honours system. The resurgence of this problem in the data from NSS 2016 suggests that the University needs to invest more time and resources in improving the delivery of these degrees. The delivery of Joint and Triple Honours degrees should be much more consistent, in the interests of quality control, student satisfaction, and equality of learning experience.

#### Suitability of Space

In order to test the hypothesis that "whilst the number of unroomed teaching events have gone down, there is strong dissatisfaction with the quality/suitability of teaching spaces", SU Staff surveyed students 415 students at random between Monday 24<sup>th</sup> October and Friday 4<sup>th</sup> November 2016.

**Question:** To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "The rooms that I have been in so far this term have been suitable for the teaching being delivered, and any necessary equipment for teaching has worked"

|                                   |               |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Definitely agree</b>           | <b>18.34%</b> |
| <b>Mostly agree</b>               | <b>50.12%</b> |
| <b>Neither agree nor disagree</b> | <b>8.8%</b>   |
| <b>Mostly disagree</b>            | <b>18.34%</b> |
| <b>Definitely disagree</b>        | <b>4.40%</b>  |

In NSS style that means there is 68.34% positive satisfaction with this area and almost 1 in 4 are actively dissatisfied. In NSS terms this is very low in comparison to other UEA aspects.

Key Themes arising from the survey included capacity of rooms being exceeded or unrealistic; widespread reports of equipment failure; suitability of rooms- spaces not suiting the teaching being delivered; repeated stories of lack of tables or tables too small to take notes on.

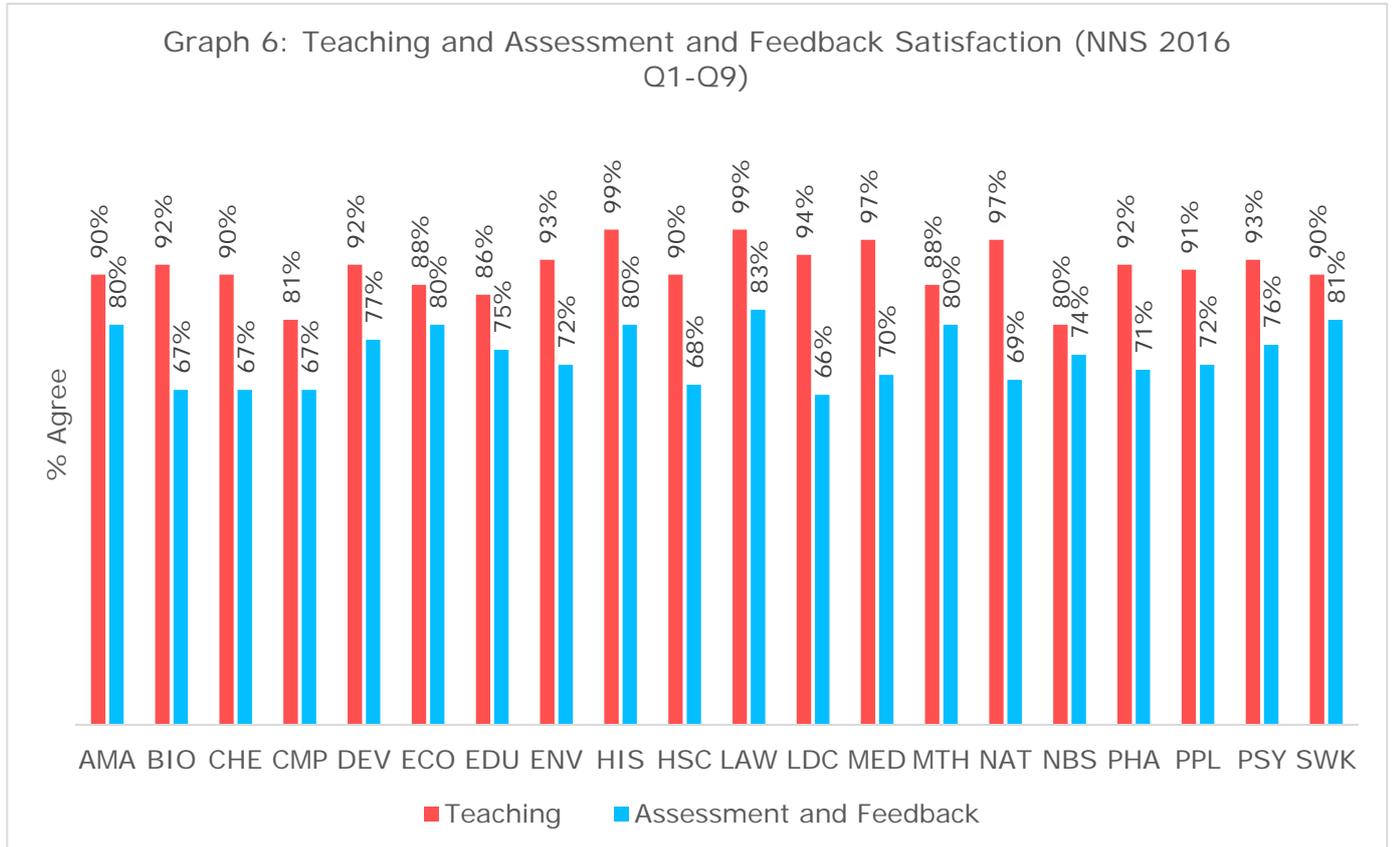
The findings build on a number of years' teaching peer observation reports which highlight equipment and room suitability as a key issue.

### **Recommendations: Resources**

1. Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs) should dedicate time to reviewing the provision of Joint and Triple Honours degrees and ensure that all students have access to the same relevant information regardless of which is their home school.
2. Courses, particularly those highlighted in graph 5, should do further investigation into specific specialised equipment, facilities of rooms and circulate responses to relevant students. Training for staff on tech and room equipment should be available and encouraged.
3. UEA should invest in a standardised and regulated amount of printing credit for each student at the start of each academic year, and ensure staff are promoting the free printers in Union House.
4. UEA Estates should develop a system for students and staff to quickly and easily report issues with inappropriate teaching and learning spaces and satisfaction monitoring should be carried out amongst academics.
5. UEA Estates should review all room capacities and ensure enough suitable seating matches those capacities and review all spaces marked for lectures to ensure suitability for that purpose.
6. In the context of changing student needs and a growing student population, the University should identify short, medium and long term needs in conjunction with students, quantify them and develop clear plans to meet expectations- with particular reference to identified "pinch points". A facilities and services plan should then be published which addresses pressure on facilities, services and space.

### Section 3: Teaching and Assessment Quality

It is vital that UEA recognises not only the low satisfaction for assessment and feedback, but the wider context of where students' satisfaction with other areas of their university experience. Teaching quality is vital, but the results above indicate that students are not getting the same provisions and quality in the marking of their work.



Feedback from the National Student Survey 2016 suggests that undergraduate students at the University are much more satisfied with teaching than they are with assessment and feedback, across all schools. The most significant differences lie in NAT and LDC schools, both with over a quarter of students less satisfied with assessment and feedback than they are with teaching quality.

#### Teaching and Course Content

##### **The positives**

It is fantastic that so many students highlighted the excellent teaching and content on their course, over a range of schools across UEA.

*“All of the lecturers are really enthusiastic about their modules. Lecturers are always willing to help and explain things. The course material is varied and always topical.”* Law Undergraduate, LAW, NSS 2016

*“The final year shifted away from hardcore academia and allowed us to combine it with practical skills in a variety of practical situations that prepared us for life outside education. This meant that our degree became a lot more practically relevant rather than just achieving it so employers know you have achieved one.”* Management Undergraduate, NBS, NSS 2016

*“The course covers a wide range of pharmacy aspects and there's a lot of role-play, which is very useful. Most staff members form a really good relationship with students, making the*

*learning environment a lot less formal and engaging. The course has also focused on current research and changes to guidelines/legislation and explained how they kept up with the information, helping us in turn to learn about keeping up too.”* Pharmacy Integrated Masters, PHA, NSS 2016

*“The main lecturers and also the associate tutors in the Philosophy Department have, on the whole, been exceptionally supportive, enthusiastic, and helpful... Multiple associate tutors have run extra sessions in their spare time, without being paid, to give us extra teaching, going absolutely above and beyond. I also think it's great that lecturers have been involved in the Undergraduate Philosophy Society, giving talks. I also think that the number and variety of modules available on the Philosophy course has been great.”* Philosophy Undergraduate, PPL, NSS 2016

*“The context of lectures is well structured and full of knowledge and detail. Lectures have made sessions when possible as interactive as possible. You can tell the lecturers have a real interest in the area they are teaching when presenting them, and are open for questions throughout, and given emails at the end for further questions.”* Adult Nursing Undergraduate, HSC, NSS 2016

*“There has been some outstanding teaching on my degree course. Tough subjects have been clearly and concisely explained.”* Biological Sciences Undergraduate, BIO, NSS 2016

The comments illustrate some of more than 100 of the positive comments teaching left by students; one of the key points being that these are across a range of schools and faculties. Some of the key themes that emerged when students spoke positively about their teaching experience were:

- Staff enthusiasm
- Staff knowledge
- Lecture content and delivery
- Teaching of practical transferrable skills as well as theory

We can therefore translate these into being some of the key elements of teaching that are particularly important to students, and that UEA should continue to invest more time in achieving. Given these positive comments, it is understandable that on average students are 90% satisfied with the level of teaching on their course. Even when comparing schools, none have less than 80% rate of satisfaction.

## The negatives

### i) number of contact hours

Since 2015 the university has decreased by 1% in quality of teaching and when looking more closely at the individual courses being taught some are doing much worse than others. While a significant number of the negative comments are very much course specific and should be addressed at that level a couple overarching themes emerge. First, is that students are concerned about the limited contact hours ie. hours spent in lecture or class with a teacher:

*“Too few contact hours”* English Literature with creative writing, NSS 2016

*“I would like more contact hours e.g., more lectures. Two per week, per module is not enough”*

Law, NSS 2016

*“I only have three contact hours a week and it feels like it could be more”* Politics, NSS 2016

*“I felt like third year did not have enough contact hours. For the 9000£ we are paying I would expect more than 6-9 hours a week.”* Eco, NSS 2016

*“The contact hours are very minimal for my course, especially when going into second and third year. I realise that there is a lot of reading involved in history, but I think that there should be more contact hours, especially now that tuition fees have gone up so much.”* His, NSS 2016

*“I am also disappointed about the lack of contact hours for the fees I am paying”* Politics, NSS 2016

*“Lack of contact hours.”* Ecology, NSS 2016

*“Few contact hours had 0 lectures or seminars for an entire semester.”* LDC, NSS 2016

*“Contact hours have be diabolical, 3rd year maximum of 3 hours a week on one day.”* Media Studies, NSS 2016

*“I do not feel it is value for money with the lack of contact hours”* ENV, NSS 2016

*"Very few contact hours per week."* Psychology, NSS 2016

The comments above also highlight student dissatisfaction alongside high tuition fees. Students feel that because they are paying so much for their education, they should be granted more teaching hours. Given that over successive years students' feel income has been spent on increased SSR at the expense of professional services investment, there is a real question over whether the increase in the SSR resulted in an increase in contact hours.

## ii) Management studies students

Students studying Management are significantly less satisfied with the level of teaching on their programme than students from other courses. With only 69% student satisfaction compared with the university's 90% this is a concerning finding. Management is not the only course that did very badly, Health Studies had an even lower satisfaction rate of 56% however no qualitative data is available to assess the cause of such low satisfaction. Students are finding that their classes are not challenging enough and therefore, intellectually they do not feel they are being pushed:

*"Severe lack of useful content in all modules. Much of it is common sense. I do not expect to be given a lecture on what a sole trader vs. a partnership in my third year of university. I learnt this in secondary school, when I was 14."* Management, NSS 2016

*"course was not challenging enough. Thought my A-Level studies were significantly more challenging than this course. The lecturers were not confident speakers. They did not seem interested in the teaching of the course."* Management, NSS 2016

*"Has sometimes not been intellectually stimulating. Some repetition of work over the years."*

Management, NSS 2016

As one student states, part of the issue may be the delivery of classes, which means that some teaching content is better conveyed to students through other teaching styles:

*"Some of the modules are pointless and I do not think they should be taught in an academic way, they are more practical."* Management, NSS 2016

In fact, problems in regards to teaching delivery is a point made by a number of students outside the Management course. These students noted that in many instances teachers rely too heavily on the use of power point slides:

*"There was quite a lot of PowerPoint presentations and after 9 hours of lectures, all using PowerPoint, it gets a bit draining."*

*"Death by PowerPoint in Year 1. More interactive lectures please."*

More generally speaking, a number of students also noted that many lecturers lacked teaching ability:

*"A minority of lecturers do not put enough effort into creating clear, coherent, organised lectures (even though these same lecturers can be engaging and approachable). In these cases, it is harder to get to grips with the subject and it can be difficult to know what will then be expected in the exams."* Ecology

*"A lot of the lecturers are very intelligent but not are very good at teaching or directing"* Drama, NSS 2016

*"There are some new lecturers who need to have the required teaching for the module and not be allowed to teach if they don't have a certain amount of experience within teaching"* Economics, NSS 2016

*"There is very small minority of staff who students really struggle to be taught by. They're obviously very clever people but not good teachers"*

*"Some lecturers have a tendency to ramble, etc. Not always great 'teaching' skills."* English Literature and drama, NSS 2016

*"Many staff were new in the school and some even had no teaching experiences whatsoever! In one of my modules, it was taught by one staff who had no teaching experiences before, and he/she did not instruct assignment clearly, and he/she was the only one teaching the module. Full of frustration for us students! If someone who doesn't have teaching experiences before, he/she should at least be teaching the module with another staff who's more experienced!"*

Marketing and Management, NSS 2016

Many students they identified an important distinction between teaching on the one hand and knowledge of lecture material on the other. Even though many lecturers were clearly very knowledgeable about the subject matter, they were unable to convey the material in a way that students could learn properly. When students are unable to understand lecture material properly, this has very clear negative implications on their learning. As one student above mentioned, it becomes difficult to know what to expect for the class exams.

### Why is my Curriculum White?

The National Union of Students (NUS) launched their 'Why Is My Curriculum White?' campaign in 2015<sup>5</sup>. It aims to challenge the dominance of Eurocentricism and whiteness in university curriculums, particularly within Arts and Humanities programmes, and promote more inclusive and diverse curriculums in higher education more broadly. Across the country, NUS Black Students Campaign and a large number of Students' Unions, ueajsu included, have launched the campaign on their own campuses. One student in PPL highlighted that the University need to incorporate the National Students "Why is my Curriculum White?" Campaign into the development of its curriculum:

*"They need to incorporate the NUS 'why's my curriculum white?' campaign to diversify curriculum, especially in Politics."* Politics Undergraduate, PPL, NSS 2016

It is all too easy for the same texts and theorists to be studied each year without in-depth review, as highlighted by The Runnymede Trust's 2015 report<sup>6</sup>. Taking forward the recommendations of the Why is my Curriculum White campaign would be a positive step for UEA to provide students with a more diverse curriculum and to commit to improving the representation of BME students, as well as international students, within the materials they are studying.

*"The modules available on the course are not very diverse in terms of race, culture and ethnicity. The reading lists are predominately white male or female, but mostly white which is really upsetting. Some modules make a clear effort to be inclusive but many do not at all."*

English and American Literature Undergraduate, LDC, NSS 2016

---

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/why-is-my-curriculum-white/>

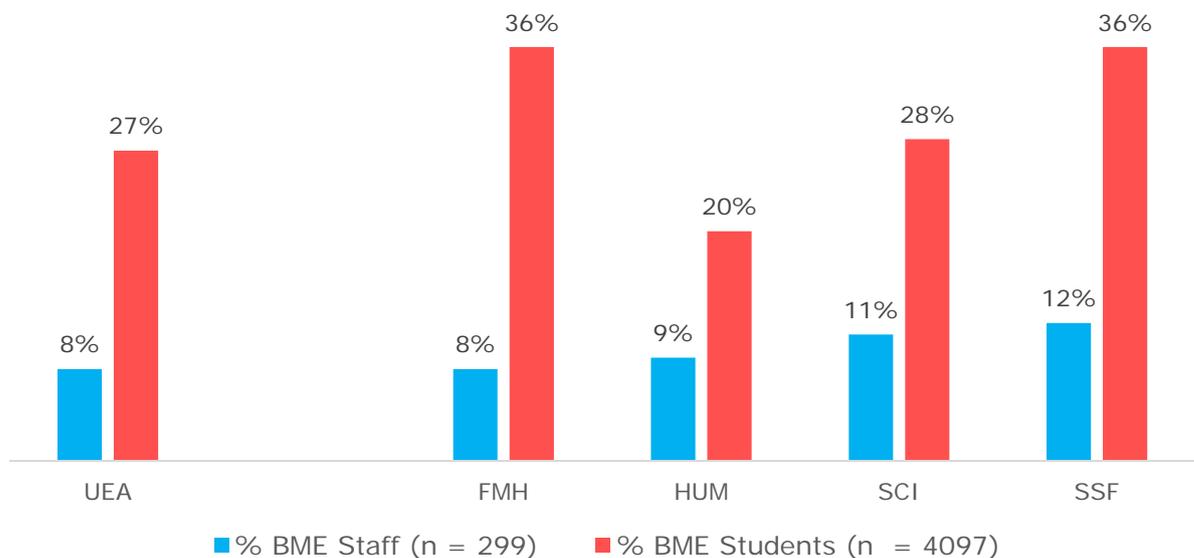
<sup>6</sup> See Runnymede Thinktank's "Aiming Higher: Race, Inequality and Diversity in the Academy" <http://www.runnymedetrust.org/uploads/Aiming%20Higher.pdf>

This issue was also raised by an undergraduate student studying English and American Literature in LDC. This student felt that the modules on their course were not very diverse in terms of race, culture and ethnicity. This student highlighted that this was “very upsetting” for them, and that they would like to see more of their modules making a marked commitment to inclusivity and diversity.

In LDC more broadly, the results of the NSS 2016 point to a significant divide in the satisfaction of white and BME students across all areas of the NSS besides “Learning Resources” (Q16-18)<sup>7</sup>. This satisfaction

Graph 7: Student Satisfaction in LDC by Ethnicity (NSS 2016)

Graph 8: % of BME Staff and Students at UEA in 2016 (UEA Equality Data Annual Report/s 2016)



divide was particularly prevalent in relation to “Academic Support” (Q10-12), where 61 per cent of BME students in LDC agreed that they were satisfied with support compared to 87 per cent of white students, and “Personal Development” (Q19-21), where only 52 per cent of BME students in LDC agreed that they were satisfied with their personal development compared to 85 per cent of white students, which has particularly worrisome implications in regards to equality and diversity.

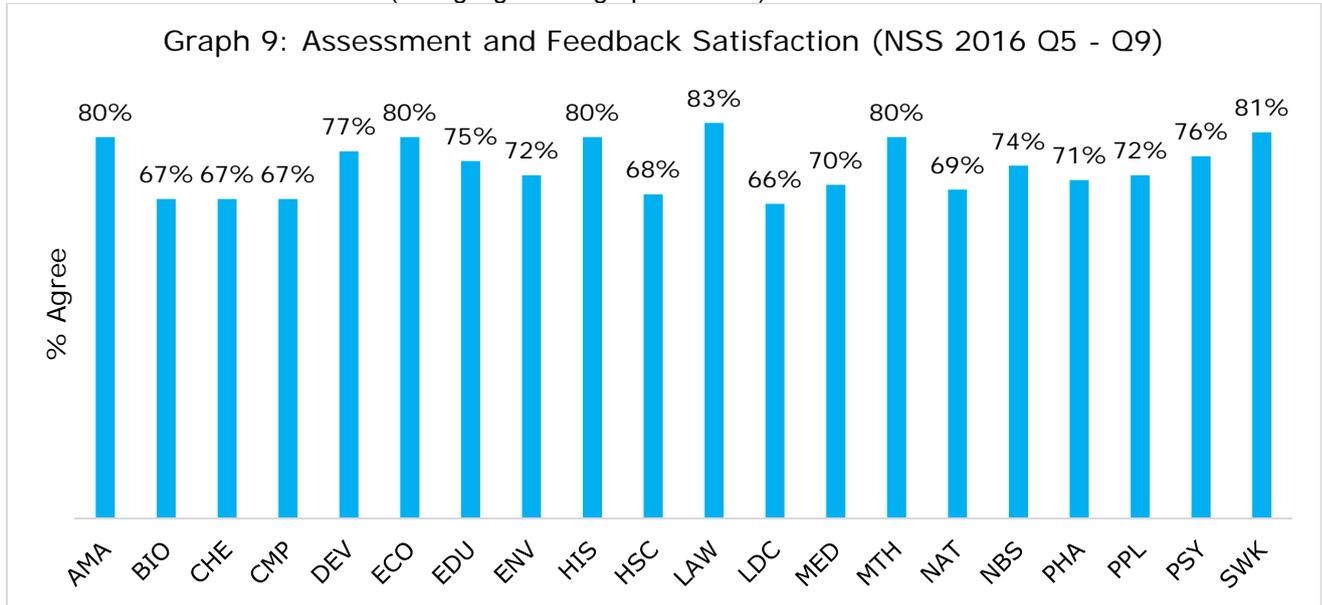
Moreover, BME representation at both student and staff level also needs to be improved, in addition to BME representation with the curriculum itself. Improving the representation of BME students is particularly important within Faculty of Arts and Humanities, which falls significantly behind the other faculties at the university. This is something that the university should keep in mind during the recruitment process<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> While these figures are based on the responses from 16 BME LDC students, compared to 131 white LDC students, the NSS response rate for BME LDC students, at 69 per cent, was higher than that of the White LDC students, at 67 per cent. From this, we can assume that the responses of BME LDC students are slightly more representative than those of White LDC students.

<sup>8</sup> More information on BME representation in student and staff recruitment can be found through UCAS (<https://www.ucas.com/sites/default/files/ucas-submission-to-bis-jan-16.pdf>) and UUK (<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/Pages/social-mobility-advisory-group.aspx>)

## Assessment and Feedback

This area is one which UEA notoriously struggles to achieve consistent and positive satisfaction levels with. Levels of satisfaction have fluctuated over the last few years, as well as being hugely different between UEA's different schools (as highlighted in graph 9 below).



## Group Assessments

One theme which arose throughout the National Student Survey comments was students' dissatisfaction with group assessments. Students across different schools in UEA highlighted a range of issues, indicating that issues with group work should be approached case-by-case. There are several themes which are particularly prominent in students' negativity towards group work.

Firstly is the fact that many students worry that group work can be unfairly detrimental to their overall mark:

*"More often than not during my time at UEA my group projects were collectively marked rather than individually, despite the contribution of others (despite the rest of the group's best efforts to stimulate, I might add) ultimately limiting the overall mark at a certain threshold. Should this impact on the overall classification of my degree come July I will be most disappointed as I feel there is literally nothing more I could do."* Economics Undergraduate, ECO, NSS 2016

*"Pieces of coursework, which were completed in groups in first year were fine, as the result did not count towards my degree. However, I didn't enjoy group work in the other years, as it meant my degree mark was being affected by the work of others."* ENV undergraduate, NSS 2016

*"Group work has sometimes been mixed and making these pieces of coursework count towards our final mark I believe is unfair, as some individuals may not contribute at all or their contribution is limited."* BIO Undergraduate, NSS 2016

Some comments simply indicate that students feel group work is flawed and doesn't always encourage the testing of practical, transferrable skills. Many see it as a burden and feel unsupported by staff because of the assumption that group peers will be able to support each other through it.

*"There is way too much focus on group work in the later years. I feel that this is used to pull weaker candidates through and isn't a fair reflection of the effort put in by some students."* Pharmacy Undergraduate, PHA, NSS 2016

*"In the Infection and Immunity module, one piece of coursework is a group poster. The problem is the group size is too large (7 people), making it hard to organise group meetings... people feel they cannot chip in as there are 6 people to pick up the slack. Plus, as each person only chips in 1/7 of the info on the poster, I don't feel much is learnt during this piece of coursework."* BIO undergraduate, NSS 2016

*"Although I understand the merit of group work, and the occupational and personal skills it helps develop, I believe there is a need to recognise individual contributions within the group, as there would be in the workplace."* ECO Undergraduate, NSS 2016

One key point to take from all the above comments is that students generally do understand why it is necessary to undertake group assessments, and can see the potential merits. However, it seems that it is staff implementation of and support throughout group assessments that is adding to the dissatisfaction levels of students. It is dangerous to assume that students do not require staff support when planning and conducting group work; this is something UEA should consider in its assessment and feedback strategies

### Usefulness of feedback

Feedback on assessments is crucial to students' development. It enables students to see the positive aspects of their work as well as the areas of improvement to be taken forward. It is thus absolutely vital that feedback received is useful; something which is not the case across UEA at the moment. There are two aspects of the usefulness of feedback that students have made particular reference too. Firstly is the timeliness of feedback, and it's link to the extent to which students can use feedback to better their next assignments:

*"Feedback on work was not given at organised times, so I was unable to implement it into the next piece of work."* Psychology Undergraduate, PSY, NSS 2016

*"Sometimes when I have submitted essays and have wanted feedback, there is no easy way to get it. It would be preferable if when you looked at your mark on the Internet, there were a link to some comments and feedback to explain why that mark was awarded"* Economics

Undergraduate, ECO, NSS 2016

*"Work generally took quite a long time to be marked and returned. This was problematic, as sometimes the next essay would have to be handed in before we had the last ones back, when the comments and feedback on the previous essay could have helped in the writing of the next one."* English Literature Undergraduate, LDC, NSS 2016

These comments imply that students are not always concerned about whether they receive feedback in the twenty days (as per UEA policy), but that they are disappointed and frustrated when it is not returned in time to be used on the next assignment.

There is also an emerging theme about a lack of consistency of feedback quality, which makes it difficult for students to keep up consistency in their writing style, content and, as such, grades.

*“Sometimes the feedback is not very detailed and can be very critical instead of suggesting how it could be improved”.* Physical Education Undergraduate, EDU, NSS 2016

*“The feedback we get is very patchy and I do not feel that the guidance I have received about coursework this year has been helpful. A lot of students spend a lot of time being confused about what is expected. The level of feedback given to students is highly dependent on the member of staff so it is not always equal for all students.”* Pharmacy Undergraduate, PHA, NSS 2016

*“The third year lecturers seemed to be particularly critical of our work and have provided little feedback. What I did not find helpful throughout the course was the contradictory comments made by staff and between staff... The feedback of our assessments I find is limiting and provides no evidence for how we can improve our skills in future academic pieces”* Education BA Undergraduate, EDU, NSS 2016

*“... feedback ought to be constructive criticism so tutors who write things like 'Just no!' or cross things out without explanation are both hindering my confidence and not helping me to improve.”* English Literature with Creative Writing Undergraduate, LDC, NSS 2016

*“Marking criteria and feedback is also variable and can appear subjective, depending on which tutor you get. Staff are not always approachable for essay/academic advice.”* Occupational Therapy Undergraduate, HSC, NSS 2016

Some students also communicated a lack of cohesion between formative and summative work, either through formative feedback being very unhelpful, or through formative work not completely linking into the summative:

*“... very limited amount of formative and summative work being assigned over the duration of the course. More formative work would have allowed for more feedback on my progression in the topic”.* PPL Undergraduate, NSS 2016

*Having formatives as a trial run of my coursework really helps me to improve the final piece but all my tutors have stopped doing formatives in my final year. I'm not sure whether this is official policy in English Literature but friends in other subjects still get the advantage of handing over formatives and essay plans before their proper coursework piece.”* English Literature with Creative Writing Undergraduate, LDC, NSS 2016

*“There have been times when I felt the feedback on summatives have been very basic. I usually find that if I try to improve I usually want the feedback to allow me to do that but at times, I have had no idea what specific areas I need to improve on, as the overview of the summative has been very general.”* PPL Undergraduate, NSS 2016

UEA needs to ensure that feedback quality, timeliness and appropriateness is consistent both across all schools of study and across all staff within those schools. The comments above indicate that a student can experience hugely different levels of quality within their own course. However the comments being from such a vast range of schools and faculties indicates that this is a University-wide issue that needs addressing institutionally as well as on a course-by-course basis

## **Recommendations: Teaching and Assessment Quality**

1. The University should identify specific work to promote diversity and inclusivity in teaching curriculums in higher education.
2. While the University is already an Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) member, it is not a member of ECU's Race Equality Charter. We recommend that the University make full use of ECU's consultancy service, and aim to become an ECU Race Equality Charter member within the next two years, and an ECU Race Equality Charter award holder within the next five years. This should align with the University's commitment to Athena SWAN and Equality and Diversity more broadly.
3. UEA should carry out research on the satisfaction levels of international BME students and home BME students, in order to investigate why the achievement gap is such a stark issue.
4. UEA should work to implement and monitor take up of standardized online marking to ensure that feedback on assessment is of consistent quality and easily accessed by students.
5. UEA should follow up on investing in student course reviewers.
6. All schools should be required to have a teaching practice development strategy, working in conjunction with UEA's teaching awards and uea|su's Transforming Teaching Awards
7. Whilst the timeliness of assessment and feedback has improved, there is no discernible work going on to systematically identify improvements that could be made to quality of assessment and feedback and perceptions of assessment fairness. Utilising the NUS Assessment and Feedback benchmarking tool, work should be developed school by school to ensure that this is done.

## Section 5: Student Welfare, Support and Community

### Academic Support

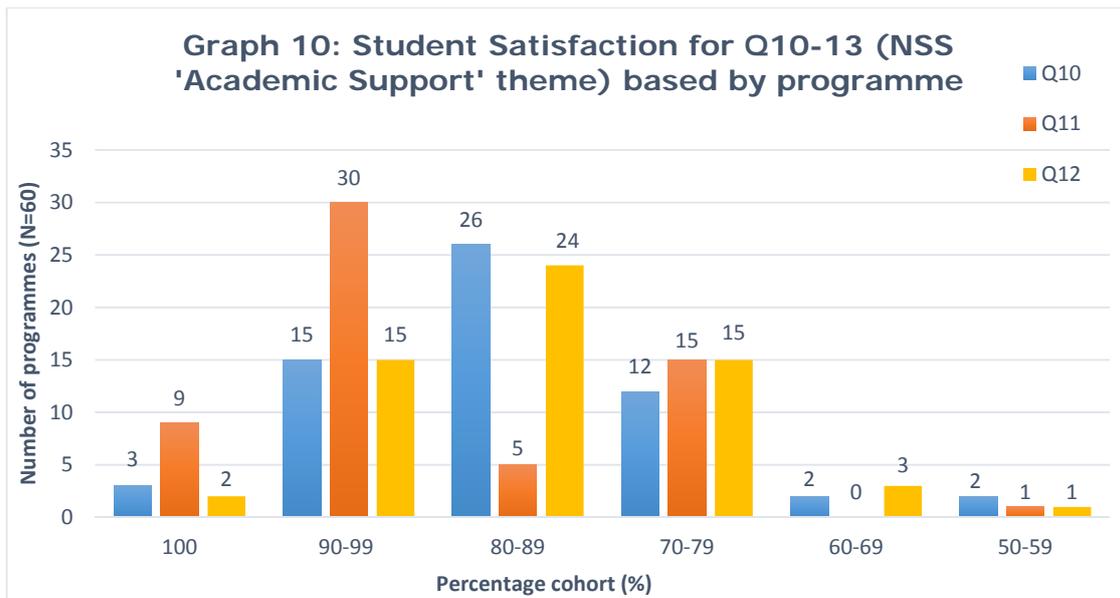
Attending a university which has a supportive environment is conducive to better learning and makes a student feel that the university is invested in their future. With proper support, students are better able to achieve their academic and personal life goals and aspirations which can have a knock-on effect on their overall wellbeing. Student satisfaction for 'academic support' remains relatively stable compared to last year, seeing only a 1% drop from 87 % to 86%. Still, since 2013, the university has seen a total decline of 3% after considerable improvement in the years preceding. As a result of this consistent decline, for the very first time since the introduction of the survey, the university is no longer within the top sixth of institutions. The data shows that out of 20 schools, only 6 saw an improvement from the previous year (DEV, ECO, EDU, LAW, MED, and SWK), and the rest (with the exception of AMA which stayed the same), seeing a decrease.

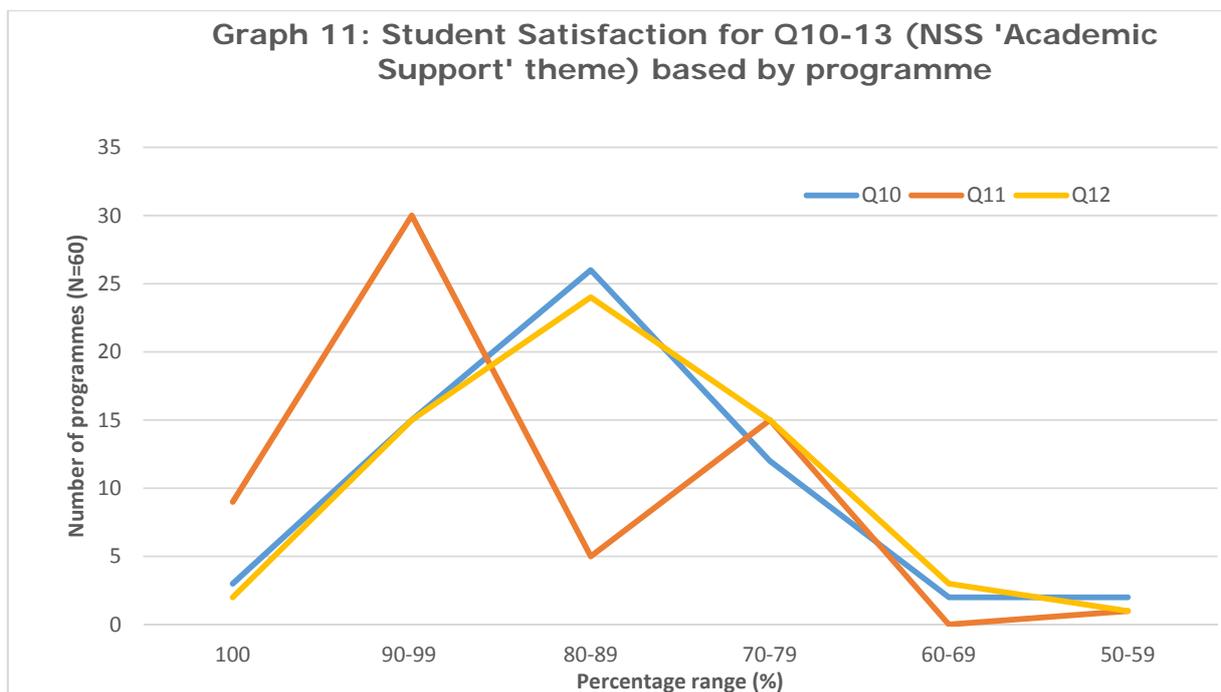
Upon taking a closer look at the individual questions asked in this theme, the data tells us that there are discrepancies between the satisfaction of the questions suggesting that students are concerned with specific aspects of 'academic support'. The questions asked in this theme are:

Q10. I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies.

Q11. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to.

Q12. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices.





Both graphs show the distribution of satisfaction by programme for each question within the NSS 'Academic Support' theme, where the total number of programmes is 60. Students across the university show a much higher satisfaction rate for Q11 in comparison to Q10 and Q12. From the data, the following findings include:

- For Q11, the majority of programmes fall within the 90-99% range, including having over double the number of programmes giving a perfect score of 100% in comparison to the other questions.
- Both Q10 and Q12 show very similar distributions, where their 'peak' response rates fall within the 80-89% range, and where they also have much higher responses falling in the 69-60% and 59-50% ranges.
- Q11 has a surprisingly low number of programmes responding within 80-89% but a much higher number responding within the 70-79% which is not expected, given that they have a much higher number of programmes responding in the higher percentage ranges.  
NB: Reason for such anomaly could mean that inconsistencies lie between programmes and therefore further research and analysis of possible solutions to address programme-specific concerns is needed.
- Overall, it is clear that Q11 fares much better than the other questions, suggesting that while students are generally able to get in contact with staff when they need to, they still do not receive sufficient advice and support with their studies and when they want good advice to make study choices it is not always available to them.

#### Academic Advisers

*"My academic support during my course has been brilliant. I have been able to contact my tutor when necessary and have received helpful advice on projects ideas, placement questions and personal issues. My placement areas and mentors have been well aware of my arrival, the learning outcomes I need to meet and have communicated rotas in a timely manner. All mentors and other members of staff have been accommodating of students."* Midwifery Undergraduate,

HSC, NSS 2016

The role of an advisor is to provide ongoing holistic support to students. As a member of the student's school, an advisor is responsible for meeting with the student a minimum of three times throughout each

academic year. While advisors do not account for all of the academic support provided by the university, they certainly form an important part of it.

A number of students found that a change in personal advisors during their degree negatively impacts on the students' ability to receive consistent levels of support:

*"My advisor changed halfway through my final year at university which was unexpected and unannounced. The advisor, which replaced my old one was very negative and did not help when I needed support. I was disappointed with the lack of communication I received in connection to this matter"* AMA, NSS 2016

*"There is a lack of continuity of personal advisor/support over the three years."* Psychology, NSS 2016

Both quotes provided above begin to address the underlying problem, which is the lack of consistent levels of support provided by advisors. The qualitative data confirms that students are either having very good or very bad academic advisor experiences. Furthermore, this finding extends to students enrolled in the same programme which provides stronger evidence that the problem lies with advisor inconsistency rather than programme-specific issues.

This problem of inconsistency is a concern that even students have raised:

*"Academic advice is not equal between all of the different advisors so some people get more comprehensive advice than others."* Midwifery, NSS 2016

*"Academic advisors are different and every student gets a different advisor. Therefore give different amounts of support."* Adult Nursing, Sept intake, NSS 2016

The comments of the two students overleaf explain the problems he/she has had with their advisors. These excerpts bring home a strong message about the damaging impact that inconsistent support can have, especially on a student's confidence and overall wellbeing:

*"Some academics are not suited to the role of personal advisor, to supporting students and I personally experienced this first hand. I really struggled last year with something that meant I had to travel in between Norwich and where my family were a lot. This impacted my studies so I informed all three of my seminar leaders and my personal advisor. My personal advisor however, sent me a reply with one line telling me to keep my chin up. This was not supportive or constructive and there was no inquiry into my well-being. Not wishing to sound self-centred, but that is the role of a personal advisor and they essentially did not do their job. I had seen my personal advisor termly as is recommended and often had to remind them of who I was in each meeting. They did not offer a personal relationship or a support network during my time at university but I am thankful to my seminar leaders who did. I have other instances with my personal advisor where negative comments about my career choice were made and snappy emails were sent (during first year, in my first term, over coursework I needed to collect that had been sent to them because I didn't know where to collect it from. Being brand new to the university)! And this has led me to feel that not all academics should be personal advisors."*

English Literature Undergraduate, LDC, NSS, 2016

*"My advisor has been very poor. When I explain my plans for after uni he/she never listens to my side of the story and always talked to me like I'm making a mistake. He/She just can't get over my decision to not pursue science after uni. In addition, he/she is my supervisor and I could not have been more unlucky. This has destroyed my self-confidence."* Undergraduate, CHE, NSS

2016

The above excerpts also show that students depend on and value the support given by their advisors and when this support cannot be delivered in a meaningful way students feel isolated, as is conveyed in the excerpt below:

*"I would like more one-on-one time with adviser. I know they are busy, but I do not have family support to be at uni and would be nice to feel someone is rooting for me."* Undergraduate, ENV, NSS

2016

Finally, students also experience difficulties trying to get in contact with their advisors, or receive a timely response:

*"The main negative would be contact with advisors. They very rarely get back to you on time and when they do it is quite late. This has especially been a problem when trying to work through my dissertation and having questions that are so late in being answered."* Adult Nursing

Undergraduate, HSC, NSS 2016

*"I asked an advisor for a reference 2 weeks ago and he/she still hasn't given me one"* Psychology

Undergraduate, PSY, NSS 2016

*"I have been unable to get in contact with some advisors when requiring help or have questions regarding my work."* Physiotherapy Undergraduate, HSC, NSS 2016

Generally we take the view that the prioritization of PREVENT training for academic advisors over mental health indicates a poor judgement of priorities.

### Lighting Up Our Campuses

In October 2015, we launched the Light Up Campus Survey to discover where on campus feel most unsafe, and to determine ways of making these places for our students. The survey received 380 responses from a range of students across the student population at UEA. Many students, particularly women and LGBT+ students, told us about experiences where they had felt vulnerable, threatened, harassed, at risk, and ultimately unsafe.

*"Walking around campus late at night when it's dark and empty is very frightening, especially if you're not on a main walkway"*

*"the bike path towards sportspark from the blackdale buildings /bluebell rd is beyond dark in winter. it is scary and only one or two lights lights brighten the whole stretch. as a walker and not a biker i always feel unsafe here."*

*"please address the walkway from the Upper to the Lower University Village. It is incredibly poorly lit, narrow, and deserted - which makes for a scary combination when you're walking back late at night and a shadowy figure appears on the path from the riverside"*

From this, we produced our internal Light Up Campus Report, which made six recommendations to be considered by uea|su, UEA Estates, UEA Security, Norwich City Councils, and First Bus in order to improve student safety on campus and its surrounding areas and on the public transport servicing campus. We have already started to implement the recommendations from this report, renewing our Never OK, Good Night Out, and Safer Taxi Scheme, for example. We have also scheduled Never OK training with representatives from First Bus, who intend to extend the provision of this training to First Bus drivers on the 25 and 26 routes.

However, despite this progress, with the very recent publication of the Universities UK *Changing the Culture* report<sup>9</sup>, which examines violence against women, harassment and hate crime affecting university students, it is increasingly important than we continue to work in collaboration with the University to prioritise and improve the safety of everyone on our campus.

### HSC Community and Integration

The 2014 Undergraduate Experience Report, the National Student Survey and The Big Conversation Report 2015<sup>10</sup> identified a number of weak spots in the School of Health Sciences. While the School are very committed to improving the experiences of their students, integrating the findings of The Big

---

<sup>9</sup> Available at <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2016/changing-the-culture.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> A uea|su investigation conducted into the experiences of HSC, and more specifically Nursing, students

Conversation into their action plan for 2016/17 and working closely with uea|su's Representation and Opportunities Coordinator (HSC) to strengthen the student representation systems with the School and create accessible opportunities from within uea|su for HSC students, data from NSS 2016 suggests that there are some outstanding issues in HSC concerning community and integration with the wider student population. Anecdotal evidence from NSS 2016 suggests that this primarily affects Nursing students in particular.

*"As a Nursing student, you feel very segregated from other healthcare professions being at the Edith Cavell Building and not being on campus often. There needs to be more healthcare integration."* Adult Nursing Undergraduate, HSC, NSS 2016

*"As our nursing building is not on main campus, I and my colleagues often feel isolated and excluded from the university, for example, we do not benefit from some of the services they offer."* Adult Nursing Undergraduate, HSC, NSS 2016

For example, the Adult Nursing students above said that they had often felt generally isolated and excluded from both other healthcare students and from the wider university population while studying at the university. Both of the students above felt that this was largely due to the distance between the Edith Cavell Building and the campus, which is around one mile. One of the students above also highlighted that, as a result of this geographic distance, they are also distanced from the services and support offered on the main campus. This can have a significant impact on Nursing students' experience.

*"There is a sense of being separated from the uni, and forgotten about. Particularly the separation between doctors and nurses with doctors having an 'exclusive building' and exclusive socials and Freshers, establishes hierarchy from the beginning and a level of resentment that makes future working difficult."* Adult Nursing Undergraduate, HSC, NSS 2016

This lack of integration can also potentially have an impact on the foundation of the working relations between nurses and doctors. The student above highlighted how they felt that the seemingly differential treatment of HSC and MED students, for instance, through the allocation of buildings and the provision of exclusive social events, can create a sense of hierarchy and make Nursing students feel under-valued.

This student anticipated that this hierarchical relationship will compromise the working relations between nurses and doctors in later life. It is therefore extremely important to resolve this sense of differential treatment, as it not only impacts the student experience in the immediate future, but also the experiences of students when they qualify and enter their profession beyond UEA.

*"It's just very stressful and when you're on your placement, you feel alone."* Operating Department

Practice Diploma, HSC, NSS 2016

One student on the Operating Department Practice Diploma programme at the university highlighted that the lack of a sense of community in HSC also extends to placements. They highlighted how they struggled with feelings of loneliness and isolation on their placements. Feelings of loneliness and isolation can significantly impact a student's welfare and it is important that any measures put in place to improve the sense of community within HSC also extends to placements.

### Cost of Living

The amount of money that students are having to spend, both including and often on top of their University fees, is something that is coming through hugely in most recent conversations with students. The increase in fees, of course, is a concern to students, however many indicate dissatisfaction not with the amount of money going no fees but the fact that they do not feel they are getting value for this money:

*"Spending £9000 a year on the course and this still doesn't cover costs of texts we need to read."* English Literature with Creative Writing Undergraduate, LDC, NSS 2016

*"I feel the resources for a history student are lacking. I feel for the same price as say a science student, we get short-changed in terms of what is available for us"* HIS student, NSS 2016

Some students' comments about money revolve around costs that occur on top of their fees which mean that they spend significantly more than they feel they should:

*"The expenses. Campus and shop and the food. Not very good towards the students, very middle-class and rich people."* International Relations and Modern History Undergraduate, PPL, NSS 2016

*"To have it made clear at the start of the course that the Biomedicine degree is not accredited by the IBMs and that further study (and cost) would be required to work as a biomedical Scientist."* BIO student, NSS 2016

*"I have had recent placement away from uni and had to pay £1500 upfront for living costs. I will get them repaid. And initially a lot people can't afford it upfront without parental support."*HSC Student, NSS 2016

In the 2016 uea|su union survey, money was the second highest concern of UEA students after academic achievement, with 65% of students saying they were either 'very concerned' or 'quite concerned' with money and finances. UEA should be doing more to ensure that there are fair and tangible financial support avenues available for all students, particularly those which incur high extra costs (such as HSC students on placement).

The government's plan to scrap maintenance grants adds further pressure to this: it is important to establish contextual relevance of this aspect of student experience, welfare and equality of opportunity.

### International Students and plagiarism

Despite making up approximately 20% of the total UEA student population students classed as international by fee status make up 52% of detected plagiarism cases (2014/15 statistics). Whilst the total number of detected plagiarism cases at UEA is relatively small the large number of international students who have cases brought against them would suggest they are disadvantaged compared to Home/EU funded students.

A number of international students will join UEA as undergraduate students from very different academic traditions which account for and recognise the work of others in a very different way to the UK system. This can lead to students moving from another academic tradition being disadvantaged when compared to home/EU students.

Additional information on the school of students who have cases of plagiarism brought against them also give an indication that there is a varied level of support for students.

Despite having the largest number of international students in the school Norwich Business School has a relatively low number of cases of plagiarism or collusion brought against students with only 11 cases for 817 international students. If we assume each case is brought against a different student approximately 2% of international NBS students have had a case of plagiarism brought against them. This compares very favourably with other schools such as AMA (16 cases against international students against total school international population of 174 or 9%), CMP (15 cases against international students against a total school international population of 141 or 11%) and LAW (17 cases against international students against a total school international population of 149 or 9%) ECO, another area of the University with a larger than average international student population (423), had only 8 cases brought against international students.

| School | Total Number of Cases | Total Number of Int Students | Total Number of Int Cases | % of Int Students |
|--------|-----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| AMA    | 20                    | 174                          | 16                        | 9%                |
| HIS    | 1                     | 0                            | 0                         | -                 |
| LDC    | 4                     | 56                           | 3                         | 5%                |
| PPL    | 8                     | 311                          | 6                         | 2%                |
| IIH    | 0                     | 0                            | 0                         | -                 |
| HSC    | 14                    | 24                           | 0                         | -                 |
| MED    | 5                     | 91                           | 0                         | -                 |
| BIO    | 10                    | 78                           | 3                         | 4%                |

|       |     |      |    |         |
|-------|-----|------|----|---------|
| CHE   | 2   | 33   | 0  | -       |
| CMP   | 26  | 141  | 15 | 11%     |
| ENV   | 8   | 94   | 1  | 1%      |
| MTH   | 6   | 37   | 0  | -       |
| PHA   | 8   | 124  | 3  | 2%      |
| DEV   | 1   | 146  | 1  | 1%      |
| ECO   | 10  | 423  | 8  | 2%      |
| EDU   | 0   | 52   | 0  | -       |
| LAW   | 17  | 149  | 14 | 9%      |
| NBS   | 14  | 817  | 11 | 2%      |
| SWK   | 1   | 0    | 0  | -       |
| PSY   | 0   | 27   | 0  | -       |
| Total | 164 | 2477 | 81 | Avr: 3% |

These statistics could point to a number of different factors. It could be the case that international students studying in areas of the university where there is a higher percentage of international students are better supported. It could equally suggest that students in this area have cases of plagiarism detected less often or that courses in those areas with high numbers of international students are designing courses and assessments in such a way that opportunities for plagiarism are limited.

Information collected from schools across UEA shows varied practise in terms of delivering support for students in plagiarism and referencing. All schools who responded stated that they spoke about plagiarism and referencing skills to students during the induction period however beyond this point practise in schools varied. A number of schools reported that they did not specifically set out a plan to target more "at risk" students such as international students and the majority of respondents suggested that they pointed to online resources and handbooks as a key part of continued referencing and plagiarism avoidance support.

Whilst there are centrally available online resources to students these are text heavy and require both the student to actively seek them out and have a basic understanding of what referencing and plagiarism are. As a Students' Union we are concerned that international students appear to be inherently disadvantaged at UEA in terms of avoiding plagiarism cases being brought against them. With this in mind we would be keen to see UEA implement a system of support for international students across UEA which ensures there is adequate provision rather than it being varied from school to school. We believe that academic staff members should be properly trained so that they are able to communicate with students from different cultures and backgrounds to help support those students to avoid plagiarism.

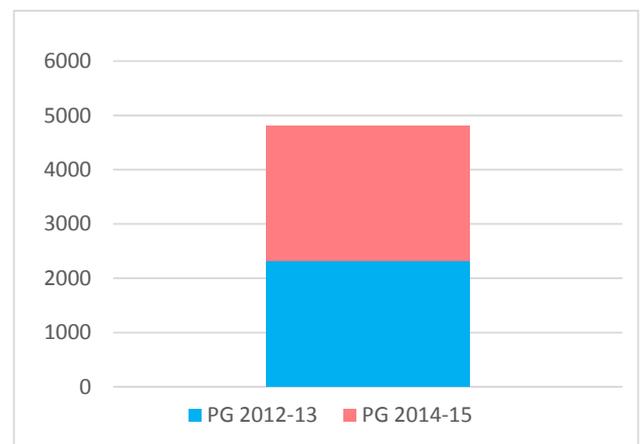
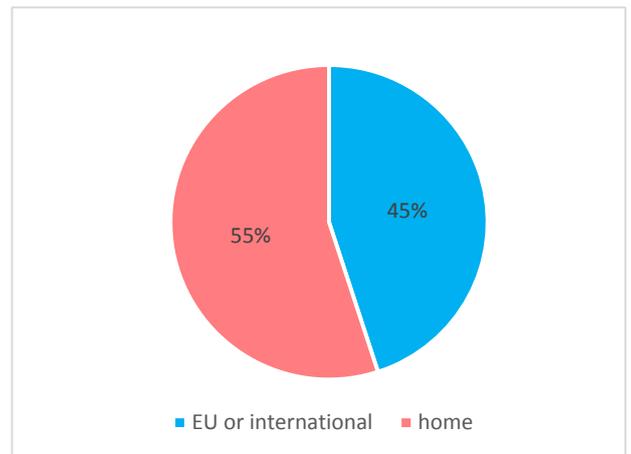
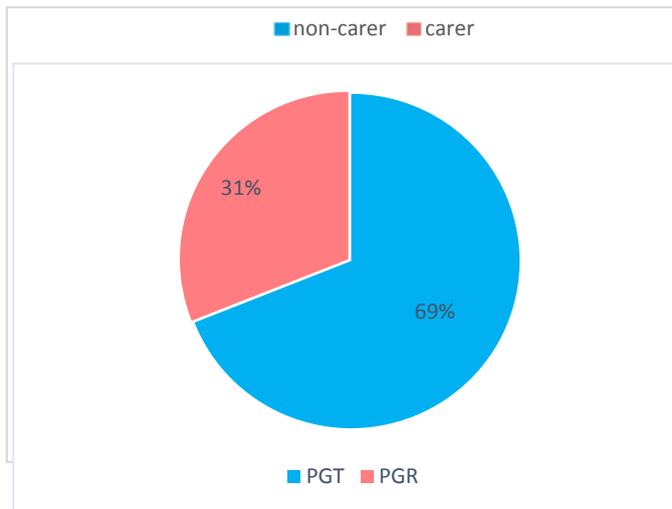
### **Recommendations: Student Welfare, Support and Community**

1. UEA should fulfil its pledge to develop a mental health plan, outlining specific support services for UEA students.
2. UEA and uea|su should lead on a community-based student safety project, taking into account the recommendations of the Light Up Campus report.
3. UEA should acknowledge the crisis of student cost of living by:
  - i. Establishing a previously promised student financial support group and widening its terms of reference Student Cost of Living group
  - ii. Following up on the recommendations of uea|su's 'Real Cost of Study' report to look at wider average costs of participation rather than mere "charges"
  - iii. Conduct an investigation on different types of students with different financial circumstances, providing information as to their avenues for support and their ability to participate. UEA should work with the SU to ensure that off-campus accommodation is sustainable and appropriate, in terms of quality and price and availability.
4. UEA and uea|su should work together on tackling sexual assault on campus, following the guidance of the 'Light up Campus' report and the recent publication of the UUK taskforce document.
5. UEA should review its system for training academic advisors and ensure that none can begin to practice as advisors until they have had correct, up-to-date training.
6. UEA should work with SSS to consider financial hardship or difficulty to be considered an extenuating circumstance.

## Section 5: Postgraduate Experience

Through the development of postgraduate|su over the past three years, the SU has become increasingly aware of the very specific needs of postgraduates, both taught (PGT) and research (PGR). Given that postgraduates account for 30% of UEA's overall population, it is important to ensure that UEA is not only providing postgraduate-specific provisions, but also enabling PG students to feel included in the learning environment rather than aiming facilities and provisions at the UG majority.

Below is how the postgraduate population of UEA looks in numbers:

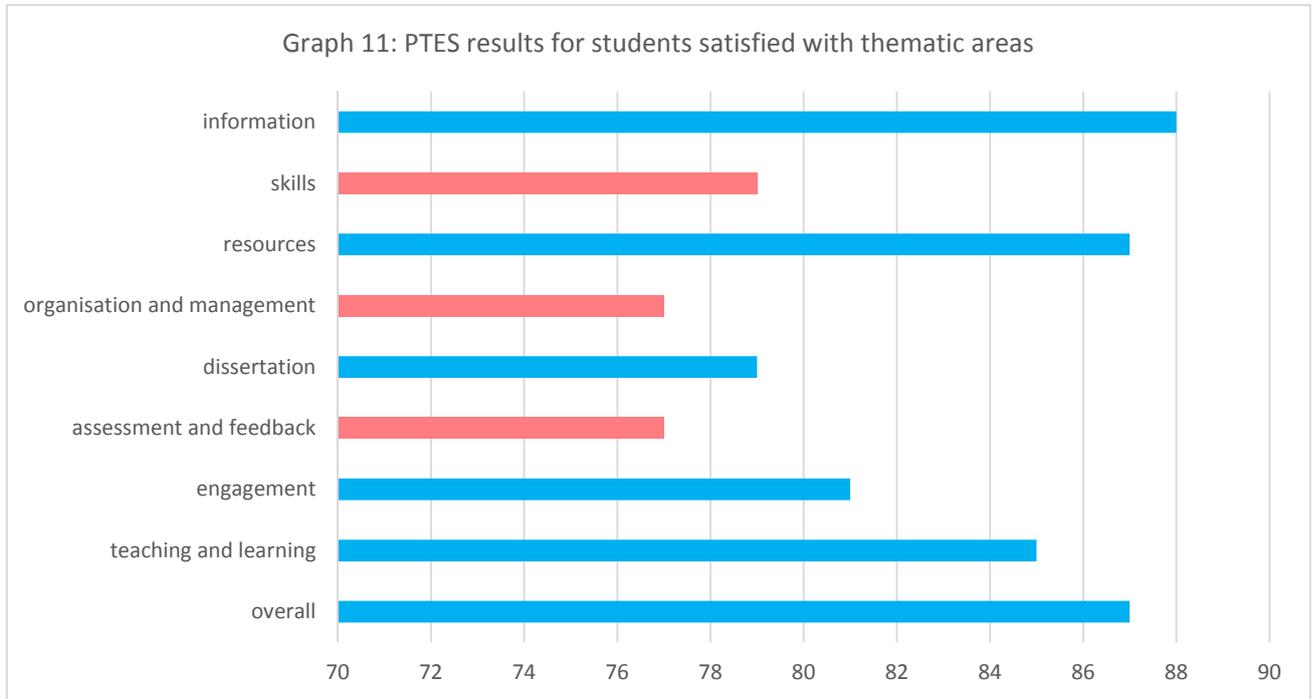


This section of the report summarises the work that uea|su have done with and for the postgraduate community, whilst also using data from the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) to highlight some of the areas where improvement is still required.

### Postgraduate Taught Students

In the 2016 PTES survey, 87% of postgraduate taught students were satisfied overall with their UEA experience, keeping UEA in the upper quartile of the sector.

There were, however, several academic thematic areas which saw significantly lower satisfaction and that go some way to indicate some of the key issues faced by PGT students.

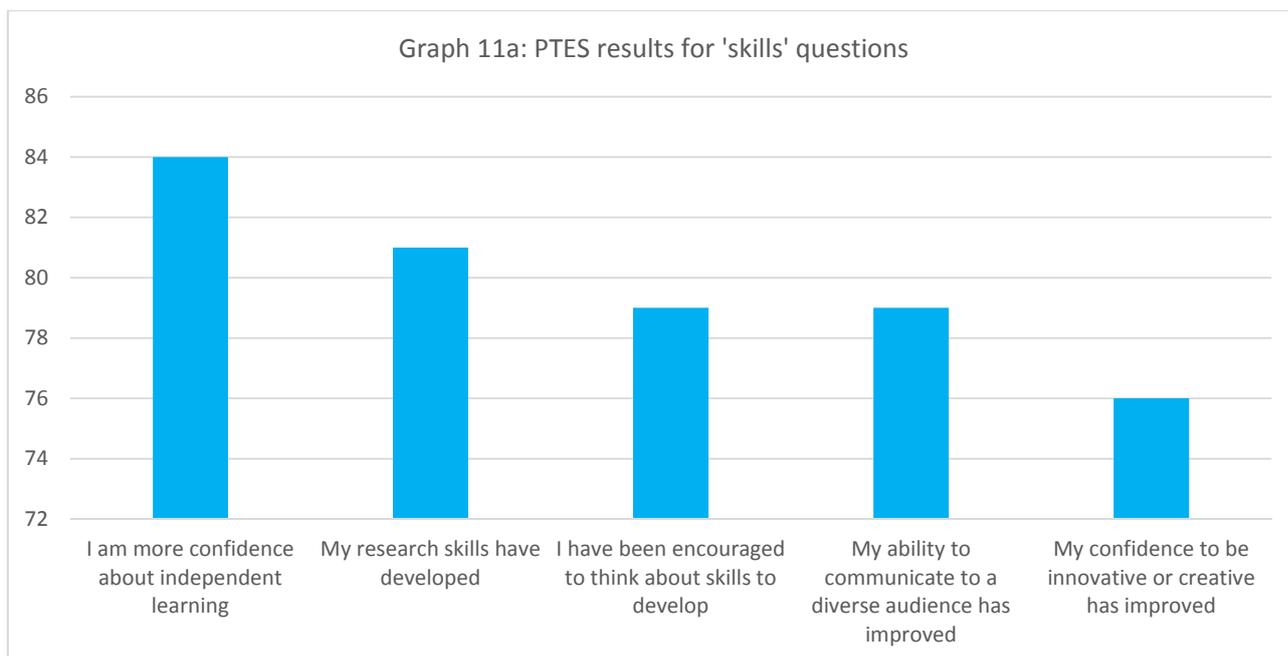


The areas highlighted in pink are those which fell at 80% satisfaction or below and therefore require further attention. Assessment and feedback, and organisation and management are both areas that are an issue across UEA generally: recommendations for these areas are outlined on p.35 of this report.

### PGT skills

Skills is a theme more specific to the PTES, and where UEA's results are fluctuating. 21% of UEA PGT students answered that they do not agree that their research skills have improved as a result of their course. LDC specifically scored below 70% satisfaction on that question.

Over 24% of students overall did not agree that their confidence to be innovative or creative developed over their course, indicating that students may feel that their postgraduate course is too prescriptive.



The graph above indicates that UEA students feel they are less likely to develop more creative skills than they are to learn research skills. In a landscape where careers can be uncertain, it is important that PGT students have to opportunity to work beyond their own research remit.

The fact that, out of all the skills-based questions, confidence in independent learning is the area that students are most satisfied with indicates that that many PGT students may be working in a more isolated and intense environment than may have been the case for their undergraduate degree. It is vital that UEA is fostering and maintaining a strong PGT community that is not just confined to individual schools or courses.

### PGT Careers

Only 79% of PGT students answered positively to the question 'as a result of the course I feel better prepared for my future career'. It would be interesting for schools to collect information on whether students go into postgraduate study with a conception of the career they would like to go into. Given that there are several schools offering postgraduate courses which lend themselves to clear career paths, such as Social Work (7% of UEA's PGT community), Health Sciences (5% of UEA's PGT community), and PGCE students (around 20% of UEA's PGT community), a substantial proportion of PGT students will start their course with a specific career in mind. HIS and LDC students in particular are, according to PTES, less likely to feel better prepared for their future career. This may be because the scope of careers available within the History, and Literature Drama and Creative Writing sectors are less specific, however this does not mean that HIS and LDC students should be at a disadvantage.

### What are PGT students worried about?

In uea|su's 2016 Students' Union Survey (SUS), we asked students which issues concern them the most. Out of 16 possible options, the top 3 highest concerns of PGT students are:

- 1) Career prospects
- 2) Academic achievement
- 3) Emotional wellbeing

Interestingly, this differed to the top 3 concerns of the overall responses, which were:

- 1) Academic achievement
- 2) Career prospects
- 3) Money

It's no real surprise that by postgraduate level students are starting to focus more specifically on their career, thus indicating that provisions for PGT students may need to vary to those for UG students.

This links back the need for students on PG studies to be gaining tangible skills: at PG level students are more likely to be looking to get straight into work and thus those transferrable skills are going to be of a particularly high priority.

Emotional wellbeing is the third highest concern of PGT students, compared to this being money for the overall respondents. This could be linked to the often considerable step up in workload and difficulty between UG and PGT studies; it would be interesting for Student Support Services (SSS) and advice|su to investigate the uptake of PGT requests for support and whether there are any particular trends in the support they are after.

#### Integrated Masters Students are PGTs too!

This year, uea|su have noticed increasing number of students making complaints about the lack of support on integrated masters courses.

There are currently over 200 integrated masters students studying at UEA, and most of them are on courses such as MPharm, MChem, or MNatSci.

When integrated masters students are in their final year, they receive the same support as undergraduates: across all schools with Integrated Masters courses there rarely seems to be a clear transition period or induction into this higher level of study.

At the moment, integrated masters students have to:

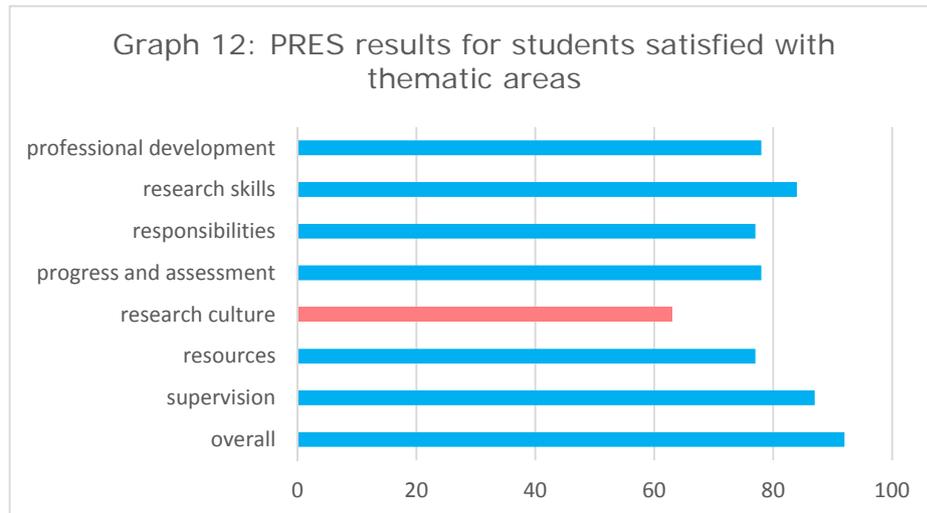
- pay tuition fees rates of £9000 per year, instead of the lower fees offered to postgraduate students (such as the £7,300 for MSc Environmental Sciences)
- Not given rights to postgraduate study spaces in the library
- Only allowed to take books out of the library for 2 weeks, not 6 weeks like other postgraduates
- Often not invited to induction weeks for masters students. This is a missed opportunity to meet new students and find out about the support available to students on masters courses.

One of the key aims uea|su's Postgraduate Education Officer, Maddie, is to lobby the university to make provisions to formally recognise Integrated Masters students in the same way that PGT students are. Allowing access to the PG study spaces and the 6 weeks library loan, coordinating proper inductions to fourth year, and inviting Integrated Masters students to induction events are just three simple things that the University should do as a first step to this.

## Postgraduate Research Students

In the 2015 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), 82% of respondents were satisfied overall with their postgraduate research experience to date. It is worth noting that students answering this survey will be at varying stages of their research qualification, which although gives a more holistic view does provide some levels of discrepancy.

That said, there are clear areas where satisfaction is lower. The graph below shows the percentage of students who responded positively to the relevant themes of the PRES.



As the graph illustrates, it is the category of 'research culture' that falls significantly below the satisfaction levels of other categories. This indicates that the academic element of their experience is more positive, whilst the social and cultural elements are causing higher dissatisfaction. The specific statements that respondents have to indicate their levels of satisfaction with within the 'research culture' theme are:

- "My department provides a good seminar programme" (72% satisfaction)
- "I have frequent opportunities to discuss my research with other research students" (63% satisfaction)
- "The research ambience in my department or faculty stimulates my work" (57% satisfaction)
- "I have opportunities to become involved in the wider research community, beyond my department" (60% satisfaction).

The key element of these statements is centred around the postgraduate community, both in an academic and more personal sense. Given the fact that at least a quarter of students answered negatively to all This also links to the findings of uea|su's union survey 2016, where the top three highest concerns of PGR student respondents were:

- 1) Career prospects
- 2) Academic achievement
- 3) Emotional wellbeing

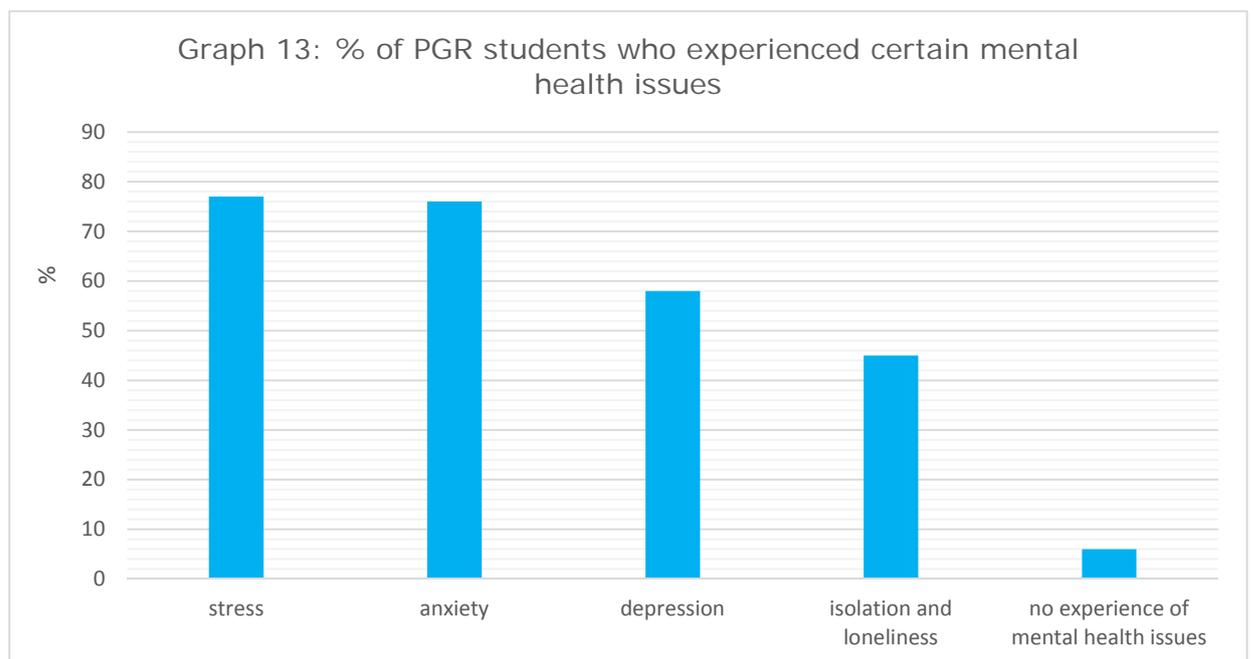
Similarly to the results of PGT students, the PGR focus tends to be more on the outcome of the qualification and on a set career goal. This makes sense given that PGR studies often lend themselves to involvement in a very niche area of study and thus into a more specific career.

It is worth focussing more intently on the third highest concern of PGR students: emotional wellbeing. This links back to the results of the 2015 PRES around a dissatisfactory research culture, much of which links to the emotional support for PGR students.

As a result of both the PRES results and anecdotal findings, uea|su conducted a survey in 2015 on postgraduate mental health. This led to a full-length report and rolling yearly project “The Honesty Project”<sup>11</sup>.

### The Honesty Project: PGR students and wellbeing

The Honesty Project started as a simple survey to gauge the levels of support available to PGR students. It, however, ended up alerting uea|su to the fact that PGR students are highly vulnerable to mental health issues as a direct result of the stress of their studies and the isolating nature of a research degree.



As can be seen from the graph, only 6% of PGR students who responded to the survey had experienced no mental health issues during their research experience.

From analyzing the data, uea|su consolidated the findings into four key themes:

#### 1) Lack of community

Many PGR students alluded to a lack of community during their studies, and that research work can be extremely isolating. Although Union House now has Scholar’s Bar and the Postgraduate Lounge and student staff to support our postgraduate|su campaign, more needs to be done within schools and faculties to foster PGR communities.

#### 2) Lack of support

Even when students are aware of support systems they found it difficult to access them or felt that staff do not have sufficient knowledge or empathy as to the kind of issues that PGR students are more likely to face. UEA should ensure that PGR students are being signposted correctly by personal supervisors where necessary, either to the PGR office or to appropriate members of SSS. Given the often specific nature of

<sup>11</sup> The full report with findings and analysis is available at <https://www.uea.su/pageassets/postgraduate/thehonestyproject/Honesty-Project-Report.pdf>

PGR issues, staff members within the PGR office should liaise with SSS advisors to ensure there is correct support and advice available.

### 3) Expectations of PGR students

This theme is two-fold, both in terms of students' expectations about their studies and in terms of what staff expect of their PGR students. Many students implied that they went into their PGR studies without having been made fully aware of what it would entail and of how they could gain support and guidance when their project is predominantly independent.

### 4) Work-life balance

Around 12% of respondents work between 11 and 30 hours a week, and around 15% of respondents have caring responsibilities. Many of the comments in the survey indicated PGR students finding difficulty in balancing their work, study, social and home commitments. This is something that the Union is keen to explore further to provide as much support as possible.

## **Recommendations: PG Students**

1. All schools should be required to review their PGT programmes in light of findings on skills development and career focus, highlighting and enhancing skills content where appropriate.
2. UEA should conduct a research project on PGR representation within each Faculty and, from the results, compile a revised Code of Practice for PGR.
3. UEA should ensure that integrated masters students are able to:
  - i. access the PG section of the library
  - ii. take out books for 6 weeks like other PGT students
  - iii. be invited to all masters induction talks
4. The SSS mental health strategy should include a specific PGR mental health strand to address the needs of these users.
5. As space is a key component of PGR community, PGR research space should be at the heart of schools- with strategies in place both for existing buildings in the short/medium term and built into new building plans.
6. UEA to commit to facilitating communication between PGR and PGT students (specifically when PGTs engage in their dissertation period) to promote a wider 'research culture'.

## **Section 6: General**

### **Student Charter**

“The University of East Anglia’s commitment to providing an exceptional student experience depends upon a dynamic and effective partnership between its staff and students. Our Student Charter outlines the nature of this relationship by setting out what you as a student can expect from the University and, in turn, what is expected of you.”

UEA Student Charter, p1.

Anecdotal evidence shared by student officers last year UEASU suggested that awareness of the UEA student charter is very low amongst the student body. In a survey of 100 student staff carried out in late Sep/early Oct, only 3 students indicated that they were aware that the Charter existed at all.

On the Student Charter item in July we submitted as follows:

- Whilst we recognise that the standard timetable for review of charter means a formal review is some way off, we believe the document to be of so little use in its present form that we cannot support its continued publication in its present form.
- We would therefore in addition argue that the main joint review of the document be brought forward to 2016-17 and a paper to this end has been submitted to LTC

### **Student Financial Information**

In March 2014 HEFCE published a circular letter and reports on presenting income and expenditure information to current students. This was to encourage greater transparency for students and the wider public about how institutions spend their income.

They asked universities to provide information on their income and expenditure in a way that students could easily understand. They emphasised the importance of dialogue with students to ensure that institutions present information in a way that meets student needs.

It is not clear that this has been done at UEA and if it has that it has had any discernable impact on student awareness.

### **Student Representation**

A new National Student Survey will be launched in 2017 with revised questions on learner voice:

23. I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course
24. Staff value students’ views and opinions about the course
25. It is clear how students’ feedback on the course has been acted on
26. The students’ union (association or guild) effectively represents students’ academic interests

Low scores in questions Q23-25 in internal surveys suggest to us that the University should invest in coordination in this area. As a first step, an exercise identifying dedicated staff capacity for this area in similar and competitor institutions should be carried out.

### **Recommendations: General**

1. To review the Student Charter in light of findings from the uea|su/TSEP work carried out over the summer.
2. To review institutional financial information available to students and identify ways in which student representatives might be better involved in University financial decision making
3. To identify dedicated staff capacity for student representation in similar and competitor institutions with a view to identifying appropriate investment.

## Summary of Recommendations

### Recommendations: Organisation and Management

7. A consistency and standards review should be carried out across hubs, to include an audit of the training and support for staff in all 3 hubs. The review should include work across Student Support Services, uea|su and the hubs themselves to ensure that there is consistency and shared information when signposting students.
8. Schools with satisfaction levels below 80% satisfaction for communication should be caused to investigate this and report back on their findings and actions.
9. UEA should commit to working towards a student-centred timetabling system which allows for students to more easily plan ahead and balance commitments. Examples of action within such an approach could include timetables being released at least 2 weeks prior to the start of each semester and/or to have the dates and times of modules confirmed when students make their module choices.
10. In an any event to develop systems to urgently eradicate “back to back” lectures on different sides of campus.
11. UEA's Business Intelligence Unit and uea|su should carry out a joint project on examining the experience of students with caring responsibilities to identify potential barriers based around current O&M practice.
12. UEA and uea|su will be carrying out joint investigations into HSC placements to establish students' expectations, realities, recommendations to improve the placement experience.

### Recommendations: Resources

1. Student Staff Liaison Committees (SSLCs) should dedicate time to reviewing the provision of Joint and Triple Honours degrees and ensure that all students have access to the same relevant information regardless of which is their home school.
2. Courses, particularly those highlighted in graph 5, should do further investigation into specific specialised equipment, facilities of rooms and circulate responses to relevant students. Training for staff on tech and room equipment should be available and encouraged.
3. UEA should invest in a standardised and regulated amount of printing credit for each student at the start of each academic year, and ensure staff are promoting the free printers in Union House.
4. UEA Estates should develop a system for students and staff to quickly and easily report issues with inappropriate teaching and learning spaces and satisfaction monitoring should be carried out amongst academics.
5. UEA Estates should review all room capacities and ensure enough suitable seating matches those capacities and review all spaces marked for lectures to ensure suitability for that purpose.
6. In the context of changing student needs and a growing student population, the University should identify short, medium and long term needs in conjunction with students, quantify them and develop clear plans to meet expectations- with particular reference to identified “pinch points”. A facilities and services plan should then be published which addresses pressure on facilities, services and space.

### Recommendations: Teaching and Assessment Quality

1. The University should identify specific work to promote diversity and inclusivity in teaching curriculums in higher education.
2. While the University is already an Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) member, it is not a member of ECU's Race Equality Charter. We recommend that the University make full use of ECU's consultancy service, and aim to become an ECU Race Equality Charter member within the next two years, and an ECU Race Equality Charter award holder within the next five years. This should align with the University's commitment to Athena SWAN and Equality and Diversity more broadly.
3. UEA should carry out research on the satisfaction levels of international BME students and home BME students, in order to investigate why the achievement gap is such a stark issue.
4. UEA should work to implement and monitor take up of standardized online marking to ensure that feedback on assessment in of consistent quality and easily accessed by students.
5. UEA should follow up on investing in student course reviewers.
6. All schools should be required to have a teaching practice development strategy, working in conjunction with UEA's teaching awards and uea|su's Transforming Teaching Awards

7. Whilst the timeliness of assessment and feedback has improved, there is no discernible work going on to systematically identify improvements that could be made to quality of assessment and feedback and perceptions of assessment fairness. Utilising the NUS Assessment and Feedback benchmarking tool, work should be developed school by school to ensure that this is done.

#### **Recommendations: Student Welfare, Support and Community**

1. UEA should fulfil its pledge to develop a mental health plan, outlining specific support services for UEA students.
2. UEA and uea|su should lead on a community-based student safety project, taking into account the recommendations of the Light Up Campus report.
3. UEA should acknowledge the crisis of student cost of living by:
  - i. Establishing a previously promised student financial support group and widening its terms of reference Student Cost of Living group
  - ii. Following up on the recommendations of uea|su's 'Real Cost of Study' report to look at wider average costs of participation rather than mere "charges"
  - iii. Conduct an investigation on different types of students with different financial circumstances, providing information as to their avenues for support and their ability to participate. UEA should work with the SU to ensure that off-campus accommodation is sustainable and appropriate, in terms of quality and price and availability.
4. UEA and uea|su should work together on tackling sexual assault on campus, following the guidance of the 'Light up Campus' report and the recent publication of the UUK taskforce document.
5. UEA should review its system for training academic advisors and ensure that none can begin to practice as advisors until they have had correct, up-to-date training.
6. UEA should work with SSS to consider financial hardship or difficulty to be considered an extenuating circumstance.

#### **Recommendations: PG Students**

1. All schools should be required to review their PGT programmes in light of findings on skills development and career focus, highlighting and enhancing skills content where appropriate.
2. UEA should conduct a research project on PGR representation within each Faculty and, from the results, compile a revised Code of Practice for PGR.
3. UEA should ensure that integrated masters students are able to:
  - i. access the PG section of the library
  - ii. take out books for 6 weeks like other PGT students
  - iii. be invited to all masters induction talks
4. The SSS mental health strategy should include a specific PGR mental health strand to address the needs of these users.
5. As space is a key component of PGR community, PGR research space should be at the heart of schools- with strategies in place both for existing buildings in the short/medium term and built into new building plans.
6. UEA to commit to facilitating communication between PGR and PGT students (specifically when PGTs engage in their dissertation period) to promote a wider 'research culture'.

#### **Recommendations: General**

1. To review the Student Charter in light of findings from the uea|su/TSEP work carried out over the summer.
2. To review institutional financial information available to students and identify ways in which student representatives might be better involved in University financial decision making
3. To identify dedicated staff capacity for student representation in similar and competitor institutions with a view to identifying appropriate investment.