

UEA Students' Union Student Experience Report 2017/18

Introduction

1. This report was authored by the Research, Policy and Projects Coordinator at University of East Anglia Students' Union¹. It brings together the most recent research on the student experience in 2017.
2. This report draws upon a large range of data from the uea(su) Students' Union Survey (SUS) 2017², the National Student Survey (NSS) 2017³, the UEA Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (UEA PTES) 2016⁴, the UEA Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (UEA PRES) 2017⁵, and uea(su)'s weekly Quality Conversation (QC)⁶ Surveys to try to build the most accurate picture of the Student Experience at UEA in 2017.
3. We have focused on 5 key themes that emerged from the data in this report.
4. We have 33 recommendations for the Students' Union and 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 across a variety of demographics.
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

The Higher Education landscape nationally is incredibly uncertain currently due to a number of factors including incoming changes brought about by the Teaching Excellence Framework, the developing role of the Office for Students, and Brexit's implications on British Higher Education. These are undoubtedly affecting and shaping student experience nationally, but there are also a number of factors that are particularly pertinent at UEA specifically which are affecting student satisfaction and the student experience alongside these national issues.

Through analysis of this year's NSS data, we can see a clear trend of there being a decrease in satisfaction of elements linked to strain on resources. Resourcing as a link to student numbers is a particularly pertinent theme within UEA at the moment and something that students are acutely aware of. This will be explored in more detail in chapter 3. Mental health and welfare has also been high on UEA students' agendas over the last academic year, with much student feedback illustrating dissatisfaction with wait times for Student Support Services and a desire among the student body for mental health support from academic advisors.

These factors, and more, will be explored in more details throughout this report. 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.

In terms of how these issues are affecting the student experience, there has been a significant drop in student satisfaction, as displayed in the graph below:

¹ Referred to hereafter as 'uea(su)'

² Each year, uea(su) conducts an annual survey to collect student feedback on all aspects of their University experience. It is open to all students. The 2017 survey received 1489 responses.

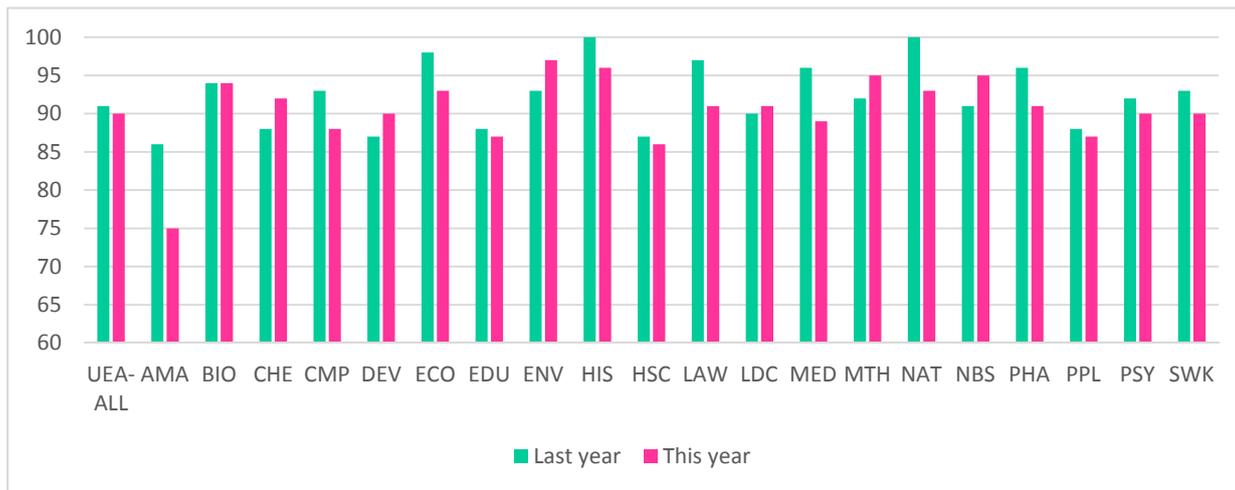
³ The National Student Survey is distributed annual to final-year undergraduate students in the UK. In 2017, 1735 final-year undergraduates from UEA completed the NSS 2017, with a response rate of 66 per cent.

⁴ The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) is distributed to all students undertaking a taught post-graduate certificate in the UK. It takes place every other, the last survey being in 2016 when 40% of postgraduate taught students at UEA completed it.

⁵ The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) takes place every other year. It is distributed to all students in the UK undertaking a postgraduate research qualification. It achieved a response rate of 58% in 2017, matching that of the 2015 survey.

⁶ Quality Conversations are fortnightly in-person short surveys conducted by uea(su) staff. They usually comprise of one quantitative question and two or three qualitative questions, along with students' demographics so that we can spot trends within schools, faculties or level of study. The themes for the questions are either responsive, based on current issues at UEA, or are planned to coincide with specific times of the year such as evaluation of Welcome Week. All QC surveys are approved in advance by UEA's Ethics Committee.

Graph a: Overall satisfaction by school (NSS 2017)



Although there has only been a small drop in satisfaction for UEA overall, on a school basis there are some significant differences. In the 2016 NSS survey, only 8 schools saw a drop in overall satisfaction, compared to 13 this year. This includes a significant drop of 11 percentage points AMA, 7 in MED and 6 in LAW. Although more in-depth analysis on the NSS results specifically will have taken place to ascertain why there are some areas with a more significant decrease in satisfaction, it is important to acknowledge this in terms of a slow and gradual erosion of student satisfaction. We are particularly worried more by the lack of action on gradual decline rather than the statistically insignificant changes across the piece this year.

This report will outline and explore key issues affecting students' experience at UEA and present recommendations to UEA.



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PG Education Officer



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UG Education Officer

Chapter 1: Progress from last year's Student Experience Report

Last year's Student Experience Report had 35 recommendations across 6 themes. There has been significant developments and work on many of them, such as reviewing the University's Code of Practice for Representation, tackling sexual assault on campus through collaborative work on the UUK Taskforce document, and work on timetabling and zoning lectures. However, 20 of the recommendations are yet to be completely or successfully actioned. Table 1.1 on pages 7-12 includes all recommendations that were agreed to by the University at February 2017's Student Experience committee that are yet to be fully actioned, with a column providing commentary from uea(su) and the final column stating a revised recommendation based on the insufficient fulfilment of last years'.

Whilst we recognise that many of these recommendations require long-term solutions that cannot be actioned immediately, the commentary within the table illustrates where updates would be useful or where UEA's initial response does not match with the progress made so far. We want to ensure that the recommendations and themes from previous reports are not lost with a new academic year. We would therefore ask UEA, as part of their response to this year's Student Experience report, to consider responses or updates to the highlighted recommendations in table 1.1.

Recommendations where our response is coded in amber highlights where there has been some development or work on the area but no demonstrable change as of yet. Recommendations where our response is coded in red highlights those which we believe are areas of particular concern where the hoped and expected progress has not been matched. We would urge UEA to prioritise these moving forward, with a view to providing responses to the revised recommendations in table 1.1 at the November 2017 meeting of the Student Experience Committee.

Table 1.1: Uncompleted or unactioned recommendations from the 2016 Student Experience Report

Recommendation	Response	uea(su) Commentary	Revised recommendation
A: Organisation and Management			
<p>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.</p>	<p>Agreed - The work of Hubs is regularly reviewed and co-ordinated to ensure consistency. During 2015/16 there was a problem of high staff turnover among LTS staff which risked compromising the quality of the service to students. The Job Descriptions for front desk staff have been reviewed and regraded and some extra staff appointments have been made, and staff turnover has reduced as a result. It would be helpful to establish a more formalised approach to sharing information on processes to ensure consistency of advice across Students Services, LTS and the Students' Union</p>	<p>We haven't yet had any invitation to work with the Hubs or LTS on information-sharing. It also seems that user satisfaction is not being systematically gathered, shared or acted on and thus a true picture of student experience of using hubs has not been fully established</p>	<p>UEA should carry out a systematic review of user satisfaction of hubs to establish more specific areas of (dis)satisfaction.</p>
<p>2. Schools with satisfaction levels below 80% satisfaction for communication should be caused to investigate this and report back on their findings and actions.</p>	<p>Agreed - We will look at responses to NSS Questions 17 and 25 in the summer and require the relevant Schools to put in place improvement plans where satisfaction levels do not meet our benchmarks. We will also disseminate the good practice used by Schools with high satisfaction levels and explore developing a system of School student communication plans.</p>	<p>We cannot find evidence that good practice used by schools on communication has been gathered or disseminated. Now that the NSS 2017 results have been released we would like to see an urgent plan for action for those schools with under 80% satisfaction for communication (AMA, BIO, CMP, EDU, ENV, HSC, LDC, MED, MTH, NAT, PHA, SWK).</p>	<p>Improvement plans for schools with below 80% satisfaction for communication (AMA, BIO, CMP, EDU, ENV, HSC, LDC, MED, MTH, NAT, PHA, SWK) should be established and these schools mandated to report on progress at each Learning and Teaching Committee.</p>
<p>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.</p>	<p>Agreed in part - The University's approach to timetabling is under continual review. Our aspiration is to release timetables as early as possible, although providing a guarantee of two weeks ahead of the start of each semester is not possible, because of pressure on rooming.</p>	<p>There has been some work done on this, particularly with zoning of timetables. However we are some distance from identifying factors which help or hinder student success here. This would involve an in-depth look at student centredness in timetabling, establishing needs beyond zoning.</p>	<p>Investigatory work should be undertaken to explore what, beyond zoning, students want from their timetabling experience and factors which can help or hinder success- particularly for groups with poorer success rates- with an action plan put in place.</p>
B: Resources			
<p>1. Courses, particularly those highlighted in graph 5, should do further investigation into specific specialised equipment, facilities of rooms and circulate</p>	<p>Agreed - The relatively low satisfaction scores are a due to a mix of factors. Some of these subject areas do not use specialist facilities. With others (e.g. Nursing) we do have specialist facilities, but there may be relatively low</p>	<p>The Learning and Teaching Spaces Group (LTSG) has focussed on equipment, rooms and facilities closely and actioned estates to do an audit of rooms. This has taken place but it is imperative that a robust plan of ensuring that resources are in line with the</p>	<p>Plans for staff training on using technology and new resources must be established. This should be as part of systematic training to achieve a basic standard, rather than ad-hoc/optional improvement opportunities.</p>

<p>responses to relevant students. Training for staff on tech and room equipment should be available and encouraged</p>	<p>satisfaction due to either how they are used, or with the facilities themselves (e.g. Clinical Skills Training Rooms). This issue will be pursued during detailed discussions with those Schools during 2016/17. On Nursing, the problem is known and the issue under consideration is how any refurbishment and redesign might be prioritised and resourced. HSC have invested in a project to fully understand the requirements of skills facilities through detailed scoping activity. An additional related project of work in collaboration with practice partners commenced last year to maximising opportunities for students to have exposure to timely, high quality skills preparation. [It would be useful to have more specific information from the SU about which facilities are seen as problematic].</p>	<p>requirements of the ever-growing student body is developed. With this, provision for staff training to use these resources must be a priority.</p>	
<p>2. 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</p>	<p>Agreed – this is being developed through the Learning & Teaching Spaces Group. In addition, the BIU are already running the Non-Academic Experience survey with students and an Estates customer satisfaction survey with staff in this academic year which will provide insight on this issue.</p>	<p>This system is in place but we have not had a robust update on how the system works and how UEA plan to communicate it to students and staff, including information on what happens to the information once the text is sent.</p>	<p>Estates must create a clear communication plan for this to ensure that it is not only known among the student and staff population but used effectively. Awareness of the system should be tested during term one. This should include developing a system for ensuing data gathered is acted on and fed back to students and staff. In addition a programme of proactive auditing should be developed and run rather than just waiting for an issue to be reported.</p>
<p>3. 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.</p>	<p>Agreed – This is part of routine work by Estates</p>	<p>The Learning and Teaching Spaces Group (LTSG) has focussed on equipment, rooms and facilities closely and actioned estates to do an audit of rooms. This has taken place but it would be good to see a robust plan of ensuring that resources are in line with the requirements of the ever-growing student body.</p>	<p>UEA should commit to physical, observational auditing of spaces during busy daytime periods. This would be to establish a better lived reality of space rather than one based on people per square metre.</p>
<p>4. 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</p>	<p>Agreed - Facilities and services are being reviewed in the context of student numbers. There are several component covering: academic services; welfare services; learning & teaching spaces; library and IT services; Student Union services; accommodation (on and off-campus); campus and catering; transport.</p>	<p>This is obviously an ongoing issue and there is no 'quick fix' solution, so we need regular updates and a development of a more medium-term management assessment and planning.</p>	<p>UEA should develop a clear medium-length (2-3 year) expansion management plan, with resourced solutions to issues to do with space, resources and facilities that have been identified among the student body.</p>

should then be published which addresses pressure on facilities, services and space.			
C: Teaching and Assessment Quality			
1. The University should identify specific work to promote diversity and inclusivity in teaching curriculums in higher education.	Agreed - We are now much more systematically monitoring student academic performance by student characteristics. The appointment of a new Widening Participation Manager and Academic Director for WP will give greater momentum to this work. (It would be useful to know what sort of specific work the SU have in mind on curriculum content. The WP manager would be happy to meet with the SU to discuss further).	We haven't had any update about this since the appointment of the WP manager. Now that the WP Manager has been in post for a comfortable amount of time it would be good to establish further conversations on embedding diversity within teaching curriculums.	The University should cause specific work, school by school, to engender diversity and inclusivity in teaching curriculums in higher education with appropriate training. Any new courses, revised courses or module revisions should trigger E&D content review.
2. 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.	Agreed - The achievement gap has narrowed by over a third over the last five years (from 29 percentage points in 2011/12 to 17.7 percentage points in 2015/16). The nature of the problem and the effectiveness of the actions are well understood. We would anticipate the achievement gap, which is common in HEIs across the sector, will continue to narrow at UEA. Additional analysis could be carried out on some existing surveys where data are available and robust base sizes exist.	This was agreed but we have not seen demonstrable research taken place. If the "nature of the problem and the effectiveness of the actions are well understood" then this is not detailed in the access agreement.	We expect to see the access agreement properly devolved (not merely disseminated); a school by school action plan on any issue where an achievement or success gap has been identified should be collected via LTC.
3. 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.	Agreed – uptake on online marking is being carefully monitored and is being encouraged through management meetings with Schools.	Student comments from this year's NSS indicate that this has not been established. This should be taken forward again, and it would be good to have regular updates from schools on their online marking statistics.	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.
4. 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	??? - This is an interesting proposal and will be considered alongside the outcomes of the discussions with each School about student satisfaction and TEF preparedness during 2016/17. The University's Learning & Teaching Strategy commits to the development of communities of practice in learning & teaching, but a teaching practice development strategy may be a more systematic and planned approach. We need to consider how the peer observation of teaching might inform such an approach.	Now that TEF preparedness strategies have started moving forward, it would be interesting to have an update and we would like to see this move from interesting to agreed	All schools should put in place have a teaching practice development strategy, working in conjunction with UEA's teaching awards and uea(su)'s Transforming Teaching Awards.
5. Whilst the timeliness of assessment and feedback has improved, there is no discernible	Agreed - There is work underway to improve the aspects of satisfaction with feedback other than timeliness with all Schools, on a School-	We have yet to see any concrete feedback on this, and looking at this year's NSS results there have	Utilising the NUS Assessment and Feedback benchmarking tool, an action plan should be agreed and monitored at University level in

<p>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.</p>	<p>by-School basis through meetings between the PVC-ACAD, Ac Directors TP & LTE and key role holders in Schools. Each School is required to hold an Annual Review of Assessment & Feedback, which examines issues in the round and not just timeliness of feedback return.</p>	<p>been significantly more decreases than increases in satisfaction.</p>	<p>every school to ensure that there are improvements.</p>
<p>1. 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</p>	<p>Agreed - All new advisers will be expected to work through the new Blackboard support module before they undertake advising duties.</p>	<p>Statistics indicate that this has not been achieved: only 200 out of 1000 advisers have been trained currently.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>D: Welfare & Support</p>			
<p>1. 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</p>	<p>Agreed - All new advisers will be expected to work through the new Blackboard support module before they undertake advising duties.</p>	<p>Statistics indicate that this has not been achieved: only 200 out of 1000 advisers have been trained currently. It also appears that UEA has much more sophisticated systems for the development and deliberation of policy than it does for their management and implementation. "Dissemination" is not enough.</p>	<p>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. A review of academic policy management, monitoring and implementation should take place and no new or revised policy should be agreed with a management, monitoring and implementation plan.</p>
<p>2. UEA should fulfil its pledge to develop a mental health plan, outlining specific support services for UEA students.</p>	<p>Agreed – a mental health plan is in the final stages of preparation, which incorporates but goes beyond our commitments under the Time to Change pledge.</p>	<p>This plan is now in place which is excellent to see, but moving forward the focus needs to be on developing its implementation and communicating the aims to students and staff institutionally.</p>	<p>A robust communication plan for the Mental Health Strategy must be established to ensure that all students and staff members are not only aware of it but have clear expectations for UEA's mental health provisions.</p>
<p>3. UEA should acknowledge the crisis of student cost of living by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<p>???- A Student Financial Support Group is being established by SSS.</p>	<p>It is 18 months since a Student Financial Support Group was promised- if it has met, we've not attended. Given that UEA has reviewed its own finances, it seems only fair that a comprehensive review of student finances takes place.</p>	<p>UEA should acknowledge the crisis of student cost of living by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. 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" ii. 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 iii. A strategic review of the student financial picture at UEA should be developed to inform decision making

<p>participation rather than mere “charges”</p> <p>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</p>			<p>iv. A single committee that includes student representation should oversee all charges/fees levied on students</p>
<p>4. UEA should work with the SU to ensure that off campus accommodation is sustainable and appropriate, in terms of quality and price and availability.</p>	<p>What, specifically, would this joint working involve? SSS does work closely with community representatives and with HomeRun, but it would not be feasible or appropriate for the University to control any and all private developments off campus that might house students. Where there is a willingness on the part of Landlords/development companies to engage we will do so and would encourage such developments to be sustainable and affordable</p>	<p>It remains the case that these does not appear to be a plan about where students will live as the University expands.</p>	<p>UEA should work with the SU and NCC to develop a plan that ensures that on and off campus accommodation is sustainable and appropriate, in terms of quality and price and availability.</p>
<p>E: PG Students</p>			
<p>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.</p>	<p>Agreed – the University will review its PGT offering across all Schools</p>	<p>We have not seen a demonstrable update on this and how it is being embedded.</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>2. 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.</p>	<p>Agree in principle. PGR space is at the heart of the campus redevelopment plan (for the long term). In the short/medium term the Ac Dir RDP is working with the Space Manager to encourage Faculties, where possible and within the constraints of their current space envelopes, to provide improved PGR work space and this have brought benefits in EDU and LAW, for example.</p>	<p>PGR space being “at the heart of campus redevelopment” is a statement we would like to see evidence of now that more concrete development plans are in place. We would also like to see a plan in both medium and long term</p>	<p>UEA should provide clear short (1 year), medium (2-3 years) and long (3+ years) plans for the provision of PGR space, both academic and non, with demonstrable evidence.</p>
<p>F: General</p>			
<p>1. To review the Student Charter in light of findings from the uea su/TSEP work carried out over the summer.</p>	<p>Agreed - This will be reviewed during the summer 2017 / and AY 17/18</p>	<p>As far as uea(su) is aware, nothing has been done to review this to date. If it is to be reviewed during AY 17/18, as the response states, we would like to see a plan of action going forward.</p>	<p>To develop a task and finish group to oversee the review the Student Charter in light of findings from the uea(su)/TSEP work carried out over summer 2016</p>
<p>2. To identify dedicated staff capacity for student representation in similar and</p>	<p>NO- The University has responded to recommendations from the SU on this matter in previous years. We would like the operation of</p>	<p>Although UEA responded to this with 'no', the findings outlined in chapter 2 ('Student Voice and Representation') of this report indicate that a change</p>	<p>To identify dedicated staff capacity for student representation in similar and competitor</p>

competitor institutions with a view to identifying appropriate investment.	the new system of student representation, and Student Partnership Officers to be given a chance, and do not see a need for further additional University investment at this stage.	such as this must take place if UEA's representation should be brought into line with other HE institutions.	institutions with a view to identifying appropriate investment.
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We would like to present all revised recommendations to UEA again to be responded to as part of this Student Experience Report. They will also be embedded into relevant chapters of the rest of the report and highlighted in **green**, whilst all new recommendations will be in **black**.

Recommendations: progress from last year

- 1) UEA should carry out a systematic review of user satisfaction of hubs to establish more specific areas of (dis)satisfaction
- 2) Improvement plans for schools with below 80% satisfaction for communication (AMA, BIO, CMP, EDU, ENV, HSC, LDC, MED, MTH, NAT, PHA, SWK) should be established and these schools mandated to report on progress at each Learning and Teaching Committee.
- 3) Investigatory work should be undertaken to explore what, beyond zoning, students want from their timetabling experience and factors which can help or hinder success- particularly for groups with poorer success rates- with an action plan put in place.
- 4) Plans for staff training on using technology and new resources must be established. This should be as part of systematic rather than ad-hoc improvement opportunities.
- 5) Estates must create a clear communication plan for this to ensure that it is not only known among the student and staff population but used effectively. Awareness of the system should be tested during term one. This should include developing a system for ensuing data gathered is acted on and fed back to students and staff. In addition a programme of proactive auditing should be developed and run rather than just waiting for an issue to be reported.
- 6) UEA should commit to physical, observational auditing of spaces during busy daytime periods. This would be to establish a better lived reality of space rather than one based on people per square metre.
- 7) Whilst short and long term needs and visions have been established, UEA should focus on developing medium-length (2-3 year) solutions to issues to do with space, resources and facilities that have been identified among the student body.
- 8) The University should cause specific work, school by school, to engender diversity and inclusivity in teaching curriculums in higher education with appropriate training. Any new courses, revised courses or module revisions should trigger E&D content review.
- 9) We expect to see the access agreement properly devolved (not merely disseminated); a school by school action plan on any issue where an achievement or success gap has been identified should be collected via LTC.
- 10) 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.
- 11) 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
- 12) Utilising the NUS Assessment and Feedback benchmarking tool, an action plan should be agreed and monitored at University level in every school to ensure that there are improvements
- 13) 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
- 14) A robust communication plan for the Mental Health Strategy must be established to ensure that all students and staff members are not only aware of it but have clear expectations for UEA's mental health provisions.
- 15) UEA should acknowledge the crisis of student cost of living by:
- 16) 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"
- 17) 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
- 18) A strategic review of the student financial picture at UEA should be developed to inform decision making
- 19) A single committee that includes student representation should oversee all charges/fees levied on students
- 20) UEA should work with the SU and NCC to develop a plan that ensures that on and off campus accommodation is sustainable and appropriate, in terms of quality and price and availability.
- 21) 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.
- 22) UEA should provide clear short (1 year), medium (2-3 years) and long (3+ years) plans for the provision of PGR space, both academic and non, with demonstrable evidence
- 23) To develop a task and finish group to oversee the review the Student Charter in light of findings from the uea(su)/TSEP work carried out over summer 2016
- 24)** To identify dedicated staff capacity for student representation in similar and competitor institutions with a view to identifying appropriate investment.

Chapter 2: Student voice and representation

The revision of the NSS questions for 2017 included a new section on student voice, encompassing 4 new questions:

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 upon
26. The Students' Union effectively represents students' academic interests

Over the past 3 years in particular, uea(su) and UEA have worked in partnership to improve the representation structure, the catalyst and vehicle driving this being the development of the Code of Practice for Student Representation⁷. This was reviewed during the second semester of the 2016/17 academic year in consultation with students, academics, uea(su) staff and uea(su) officers based on progress and changes that have occurred since its creation in 2014.

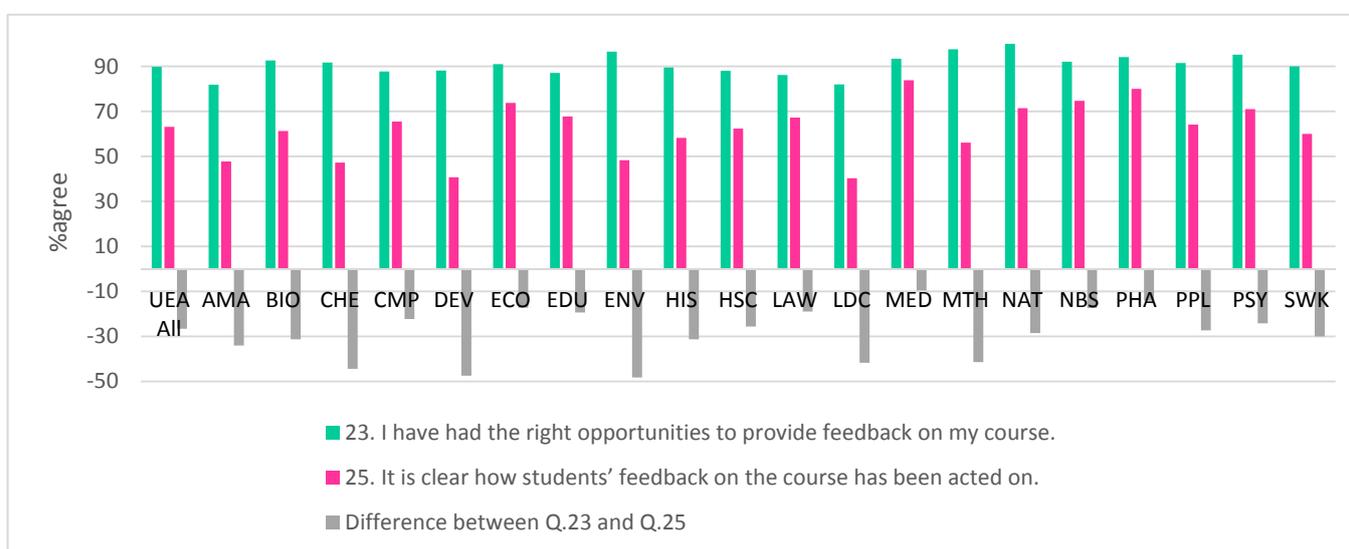
As a result, numerous operational changes are in place, and clarity made on the roles of staff, course reps and convenors. There is also a new section for Postgraduate Research students' representation, which was recognised as having a different structure to that of UG and PGT representation but one that still would benefit from centralised guidance. Despite this work, the results of 2017's NSS indicate that more still needs to be done to improve students' experience of and ability to provide meaningful feedback on the academic elements of their course.

Opportunities to feedback vs action on feedback

The results for question 23 (see list above for numbers and corresponding question) were generally very positive, with all schools scoring over 80% satisfaction and 12 out of 20 scoring over 90% satisfaction. This indicates that students recognise the representation systems in place and feel they have had the chance to provide feedback on their course. This may be in part as a result of the development of the Representation Code of Practice allowing UEA's representation structure⁸ to be better embedded and communicated with students.

The results for question 25, however, were significantly lower with 7 schools scoring 50% or lower satisfaction. The difference in satisfaction between these two questions creates a significant gap between students providing feedback and the perception that feedback is being used to influence change; shown in graph 2 below:

Graph 2.1: the difference between NSS questions 23 & 25 (NSS 2017)



The graph shows significant difference between students' agreement that they have opportunities to provide feedback, and that feedback being acted upon. Schools with the biggest difference are:

⁷ At the time of writing, the main body of the Code of Practice had been approved by UEA's Learning and Teaching Committee. Section 10, on PGR representation, was in a final draft stage awaiting approval by PGR Executive. This version of the Code of Practice can be found at https://ueanorwich-my.sharepoint.com/personal/thg15dju_uea_ac_uk/_layouts/15/guestaccess.aspx?guestaccesstoken=zbbg3MRGUsFeR0UI%2bbxxXukgIBkSKcFflyO%2b3GrEJY%3d&docid=2_199165357bc914114ae16af83090fa723&rev=1

⁸ UEA's representation structure is built on having elected course reps, school convenors and faculty convenors (all students) within each school. Course reps sit on Student Staff Liaison Committees, school convenors sit on School Boards, and Faculty Convenors sit on Faculty Learning and Teaching Quality Committees. Each School has a Student Partnership Officer (staff) whose has responsibility for the representation system within their school including working with uea(su) on the election and personal development of representatives.

-	ENV:	48.3%	difference
-	DEV:	47.5%	difference
-	CHE:	44.5%	difference
-	MTH:	41.5%	difference
-	LDC:	41.5%	difference

It is worth noting here that 3 of the 5 schools above are from the Faculty of Science, perhaps indicating a more specific area of the institution that requires development of the representation structure. That said, as can be seen, all schools had a difference of at least 9 percentage points

The difference between q23 and q26 acknowledges that students can often see that there are opportunities to provide feedback, but do not feel that feedback is acted upon or that changes are being made as a result of it. This is further illustrated by some of the 2017 NSS comments:

“Any feedback we give to our tutors are taken and improved for the class of 2018. This shouldn't be the case. We are praised for being 'pro-active' and making things better for the next wave of students. Instead, we should be seeing improvements in our time at UEA. What is the point of providing feedback and criticism if we aren't reaping any benefit from this?” AMA Undergraduate, 2017 NSS

“A lot of the time the feedback has not been acted on.” DEV Undergraduate, 2017 NSS

“Even after raising [an issue] at SSLCs over the four years of my course, nothing has been done to make it cohesive across the department.” AMA Undergraduate, 2017 NSS

These data and comments show that the representation system is not meeting the needs of UEA students currently because they do not feel that their feedback about the course makes a difference to either their student experience or the experience of students in years below them. It seems that end of module surveys and semesterly Student Staff Liaison Committee meetings as they are currently being used are not enough. We recognise that not all feedback provided, whether by students or staff, can be immediately or successfully actioned. However, systems can be put in place to better involve students in the decision-making processes in line with, and as recommended by, the Code of Practice.

Although positive steps have been taken to provide stability to the current representation system – in both development of the Code of Practice and other factors such as the consistent and online election of course reps and regular meetings with Student Partnership Officers - there is still some way to go in establishing the representation system among UEA's students. Whilst we have this more robust system in place, the 2017-18 academic year must focus on awareness-raising and developing methods for closing the feedback loop to allow students, whether course reps or not, to be updated as to how their feedback is being acted upon.

uea(su) would also love to see a shift in perception of the role of students in terms of improving and developing courses. UEA is yet to establish clear, consistent and tangible student partnership programmes across the institution where students are seen as co-creative partners. Although there are pockets of good practice, UEA needs to move forward to keep up with other institutions such as Exeter, Brighton, London Metropolitan and Greenwich⁹ who are leading in working with students as co-creators. Establishing this kind of partnership with students is something that would take time, but that could ultimately transform the way that both students and staff feed into the student experience: from simply providing feedback at the end of a module, to being actively involved in its development.

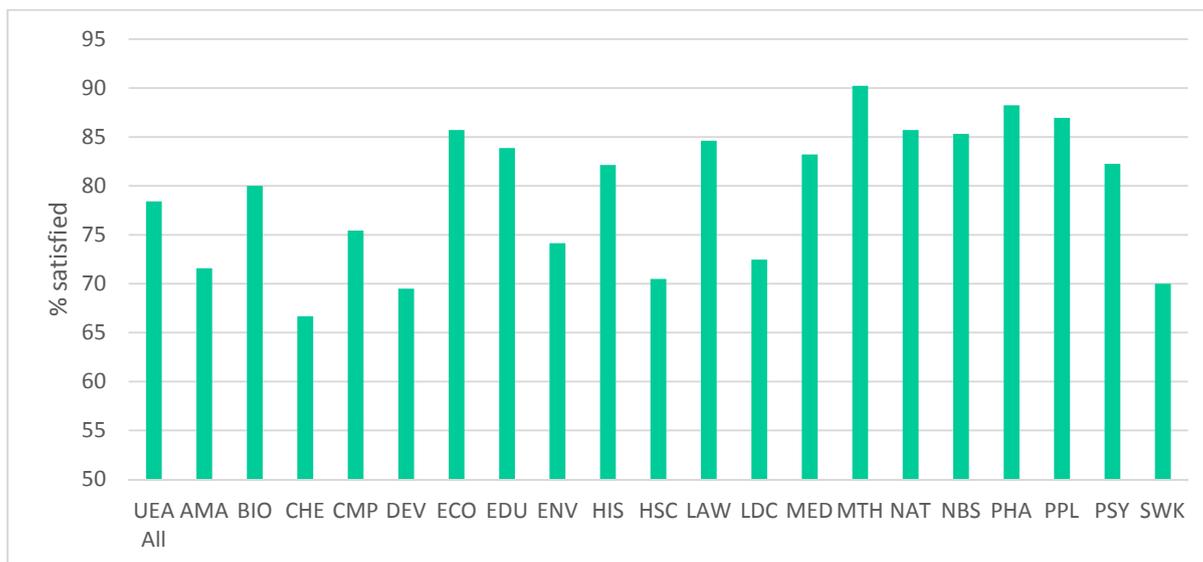
Student perception of staff investment

It is important at this point to draw the distinction between students who may be using the representation system to provide feedback (via their course reps and through Student Staff Liaison Committees) and those who are basing their experiences of providing feedback ad-hoc. UEA should be working towards an environment where *all* students – not just the proactively engaged – feel confident in using the representation system to give feedback to allow for consistent student experience.

uea(su) works with all schools equally on student voice and representation, with each schools' Student Partnership Officer being a key point of contact. For a variety of reasons, some struggle more with embedding the representation structure into their school. We believe that a fundamental factor to improving student voice and representation is consistent investment from all staff, not just the Student Partnership Officers. However, responses to question 24 of the NSS indicate a huge variance in student satisfaction as to whether they feel that their feedback is valued, as illustrated in the graph overleaf:

⁹ These are some of the institutions involved in the REACT (Realising Engagement through Active Culture Transformation) project on student engagement and partnership. More information at <http://www.studentengagement.ac.uk/>

Graph 2.2: Agreement that staff value students' views and opinions about the course (NSS 2017)



As can be seen, there is 33% difference between the lowest (CHE) and highest (MTH) scoring schools. Interestingly, both of these schools are within the same Faculty of Science, further illustrating our point that student satisfaction with the representation system is closely linked with the staff they work with – likely to be on a school-based level. Similarly, those schools with under 75% satisfaction (AMA, CHE, DEV, ENV, HSC, LDC and SWK) come from a variety of faculties, indicating that this is an issue to approach on a school-by-school basis initially, but with central support giving structure and consistency.

Some NSS comments also illustrate student perception of apathy by staff towards student feedback:

Friends that are student reps have told me that issues which they raised last year are now being mentioned by students in the year below us. Therefore, the issues have not been acted upon when lecturers said they would be! Very disappointing. It makes our time and opinions appear totally worthless.”
 NBS Undergraduate, 2017 NSS

“We have opportunities to feedback but at times, our views are dismissed to make it easier for the university” HSC Undergraduate, 2017 NSS

“Sometimes I'm not sure if our feedback on the course was taken into account.” HIS Undergraduate, 2017 NSS

All three comments illustrate a ‘them’ and ‘us’ feeling between students and The University, but in order to facilitate a better student experience in terms of student voice, students should be seen as partners in representation rather than purely vehicles carrying feedback. Schools with particularly low results on student voice should consider liaising with schools that scored better to share best practice and establish a better feedback loop.

Case Study: Bangor University (Q25: 70%)

At Bangor a small Student Engagement Unit (consisting of a student engagement officer and a Student Surveys Officer) oversees the University's work to enable students to take an active role in the development, management and governance of the University, its academic programmes and learning experience¹⁰. This involves overseeing initiatives to increase student involvement, supporting academic staff on school-specific approaches to student engagement, and working closely with the Students' Union on a range of projects.

Their commitment to student engagement has been reflected in the creation of a new senior academic post: Director of Student Engagement. Directors have been appointed in every academic school and are a member of their school's senior management team. They have responsibility for the strategic leadership of their school's student experience and

¹⁰ More information can be found at <https://www.bangor.ac.uk/studentengagement/about.php.en>

work to develop both formal practice (ie SSLCs) and projects which involve student contribution to the student experience.

Directors work closely with course level representatives and the SU each year to make clear to students what has been done with their feedback:



Postgraduate representation

As mentioned, the revised Code of Practice for Representation contains a new section on Postgraduate Research representation. uea(su) want to ensure that, despite PGR representation having a slightly different structure to that of UG and PGT, guidelines and minimum standards were still in place. PGR students may sit on Student Staff Liaison Committees in both student and staff capacity, depending on whether they are working as associate tutors within the school. Because of this, there is a further multifaceted nature of their representation structure, which the new Code of Practice chapter hopes to clarify.

Given that this has only just been formally approved by the PGR Executive, we have yet to see any impact and so would recommend a review of PGR students' knowledge and satisfaction of the representation system over summer 2018.

UEA's 2017 PRES results indicated a slight increase of 5% from the 2015 results for the question "my institution values and responds to feedback from research degree students": UEA should be aiming for a further 5% increase by the next PRES in 2019 to take the satisfaction levels to over 70%.

What is uea(su) doing in response to these results?

We are passionate about the representation system continuing to be developed in partnership with the University, and recognise there are specific ways that we can respond to students' issues with and opinions on representation at UEA.

We have been, and still are, working hard with UEA to develop the representation system to ensure that student voices are not just heard but acted upon. We are hopeful that the re-written Code of Practice for Student Representation will give staff clearer and more relevant guidelines for auctioning student feedback.

uea(su) have also taken responsibility for the election of Course Reps and School & Faculty Convenors to ensure that there is a centralised system which is easier to monitor and more consistent than each school coordinating the election of their own reps. We hope that this will also ensure that we can maintain useful and targeted communication with reps through our online election system.

As part of our democratic restructure, we are also implementing an Education sub-committee. This will sit underneath the Student Officer Committee and will allow the work of course reps, academic societies and education officers to be shared in once place.

It's not just about academic representation

In 2016-17 there were a number of high profile disagreements with the University, including the installation of the Gormley statues, the closure of Muslim prayer facilities, the closure of counselling courses and the med certs issue. Each of these (and many others) were characterised by a disappointing lack of consultation with students and involvement of their representatives, and so central to a more constructive relationship in the future is building a culture where all parts of the University think to consult students and involve their representatives as partners. A renewed student charter will be central to improving here.

The SU has reflected on our “representing academic interests” score which (along with the Q25 score) was disappointing given the emphasis placed on this area in recent years. Given the budget that this area operates on (both inside UEA and the SU) we might argue that it is miraculous rather than disappointing that 55% of students agree we do a good job! But we have been thinking hard about how to improve, and what we do know from early discussions with other University SUs is that achieving a high score is dependent on multiple factors- a deep and constructive partnership across the University, proper investment in capacity, and senior focus from the University that visibly champions student voice.

Rather than simply asking us to reflect autonomously, we would be keen that the University learns from other institutions, adopting an approach with us on student voice in general and these metrics in particular which identifies how UEA might work with the SU to *enable* a higher score. There also is an important lesson to be learned from our award winning joint project within HSC, where we have seen year on year improvements on voice metrics since the project began.

Recommendations: student voice and representation

- 1) Dedicated staff capacity for student representation in similar and competitor institutions should be identified, with a view to identifying appropriate investment at UEA.
- 2) A significant, targeted spend on representation systems including staff capacity and marketing and rewards such as representative clothing
- 3) Alongside institution-level actions being put into place for common concerns within underperforming schools, specific work should be defined and the implementation of this properly monitored at a faculty and institutional level. Each school should be required to develop an action plan responding to their NSS performance. This should be shared with the SU allowing for student representatives to input into addressing feedback rather than being only updated on progress against pre-defined goals.
- 4) To develop a task and finish group to oversee the review the Student Charter in light of findings from the uea(su)/TSEP work carried out over summer 2016
- 5) Clear leadership on the implementation (communication, embedding and reviewing) of the updated Representation Code of Practice should be established within each School.
- 6) UEA should require that all surveys/evaluations at module, school or institutional level should provide information on the results and outcomes from previous feedback collected.
- 7) The Postgraduate Research Office should put in place plans for reviewing the PGR representation system before the next PRES in 2019, including specific and tangible goals.
- 8) The UEA Internal Communications function should be reviewed to improve the impact and dissemination of institutional level changes arising from student representation.
- 9) The University and Students' Union should jointly develop and regularly review the effectiveness of principles to apply to all student facing services on consultation with students and involvement of their representatives.
- 10) Building on the work in HSC, the faculties should consider working with the SU on similar joint faculty wide staffed projects that focus on the student experience and student engagement.

Chapter 3: Space and resourcing

Space and resourcing is something that we know UEA are very aware of being an issue, however there are specific elements of space and resourcing that we would like to highlight here. This will be explored with a specific emphasis of students' awareness of rising student numbers and the implications on their expectation and experiences. Having been written in late summer 2017, this chapter acknowledges the following plans that UEA have for space and resourcing:

- i. the development of building 60 on chancellor's drive
- ii. the development of building 0 on the car park space
- iii. the renovation of the library to accommodate more working spaces
- iv. the redevelopment of the teaching wall

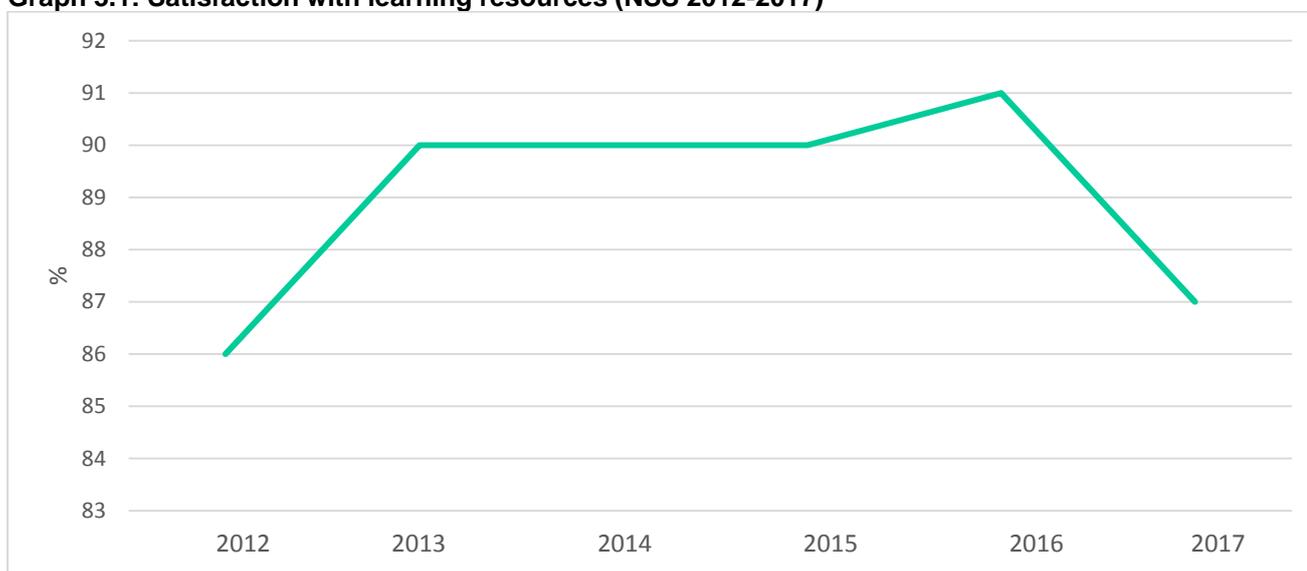
Thus, we recognise that UEA is responding in planning for long-term solutions. However there is a feeling amongst students that there has been minimal short-term solutions and that communication has not reassured or dispelled their concerns. This creates a perception among the student body that today's students are suffering and not getting the experience they were promised whilst future students may well see these benefits. We therefore propose, with all of the upcoming sub-themes around space and resourcing, that communication and transparency with students is of utmost importance.

Decreasing satisfaction with resources and space

UEA's 15 year vision outlines a plans for expansion of student numbers, staff numbers and facilities. This was released formally in Autumn 2016, after last year's Student Experience Report had been written. Between its release and now, uea(su) have worked with UEA on managing student reactions to many aspects of the vision. As part of this, we have done a lot of work on collating student views and opinions on the proposed increase in student numbers as a result of a changing narrative among the student body and a concern about how increasing student numbers could affect the student experience.

Graph 3.1 overleaf shows the results for student satisfaction with learning resources over the last 5 years.

Graph 3.1: Satisfaction with learning resources (NSS 2012-2017)

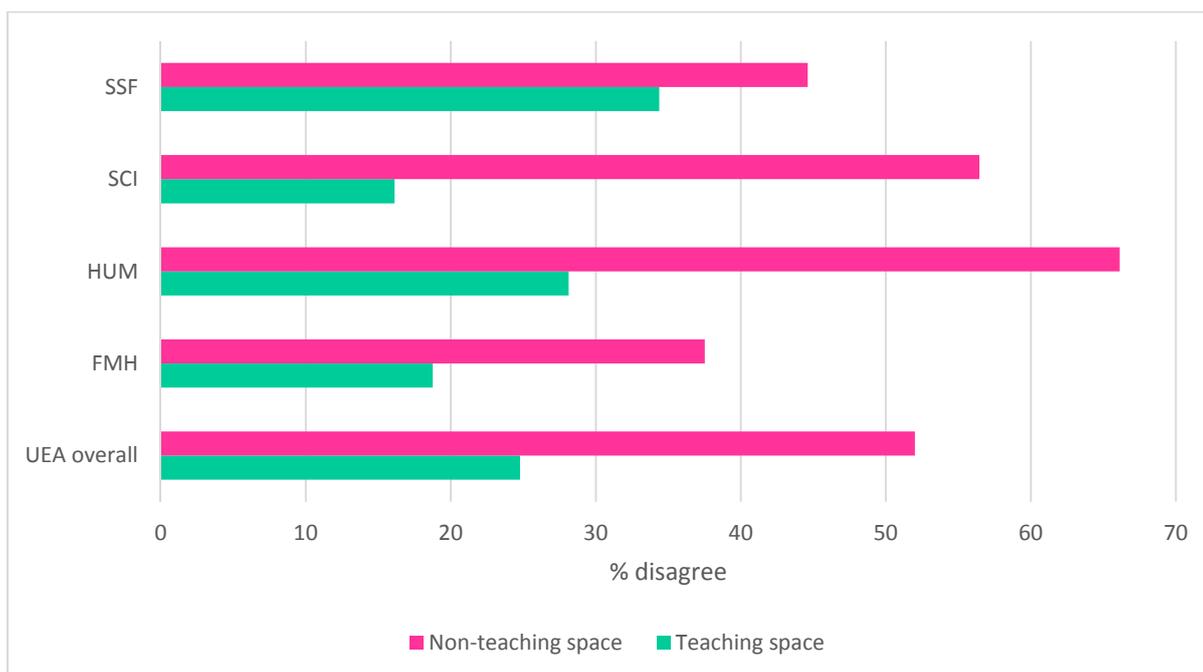


As can be seen, satisfaction has dipped for the first time since 2012, now at 87%. It is interesting that this happened in line with the release of UEA's 15 year vision and perhaps supports our view that students are becoming more and more aware of the strain on the campus' resources alongside an increase of student numbers. Indeed, uea(su)'s Student Union Survey 2017 found that 92.1% of respondents feel that 'more study space on campus, especially around the library' was very or quite important to them: the second highest of 13 factors.

Further research conducted by uea(su) goes some way to explain the decrease in satisfaction: in December 2016, a Quality Conversation about space and resourcing was conducted, with 227 students spoken to. It was conducted at this time as a response to student concern around availability of study space during semester 1 assessment period. The results, however, indicated that dissatisfaction was not just with the busier times of year. One of the questions to answer

was the extent to which they agreed that there is enough space (teaching and non-teaching) for students on their course; the graph overleaf displays the results.

Graph 3.2: Disagreement with the statement: “There is enough teaching and non-teaching space for students on my course” (Quality Conversations, December 2016)



As can be seen, it is non-teaching spaces (such as social learning spaces, the library, PC suites, labs, etc.) that students are more dissatisfied with, Humanities students showing highest dissatisfaction. This is also illustrated in the 2017 NSS results, where only 4 schools (CMP, EDU, NAT and SWK) saw an increase in overall satisfaction with resources and only 1 school, EDU, saw an increase in satisfaction with library resources. Humanities students had particularly high dissatisfaction with non-teaching spaces, whilst Social Sciences students' were the most dissatisfied with teaching space. Although we are aware of the work that has gone into creating more work stations in the library, this was done more to accommodate the increasing demand rather than to develop a new area to offset increased student numbers. As a result we would predict that if we were to run a similar Quality Conversation again this semester the results will be little changed.

Student awareness of the impact of increasing student numbers

It is important to acknowledge that students are noticing the impact that increasing student numbers are having on the resources and space available on campus.

Comments in both Quality Conversations conducted in December 2016 and comments left in this year's NSS indicate that many students are becoming increasingly aware and concerned about the implications of increasing student numbers:

"It feels like the university are attracting international students and promising them great facilities like the library but aren't actually delivering this... They haven't accounted for all the extra students on campus and the space they will need..." Science Student, Quality Conversations December 2016

"With new students there is just not enough space in the hive and there is no library space" Social Sciences Student, Quality Conversations December 2016

"I am concerned about the growing student numbers going forward" Humanities Student, Quality Conversations December 2016

"I have read about increasing student numbers - surely there isn't space for this. Not sustainable." Faculty of Health and Medicine Student, Quality Conversations December 2016

"To keep up with the increasingly competitive and commercialised world of higher education UEA has adopted a model that prioritises high student turnover/numbers and 'expansionist' attitude to courses over academic rigour, appropriate facilities and high quality teaching... Today, students joining AMA for ART courses are arriving in cohorts larger than the building can accommodate (60 minimum rather than the previous 50 maximum)" AMA Student, NSS 2017

"Increase in student numbers and how the university have dealt with it not good. Library is far too busy to work in." HUM Student, NSS 2017

"Increasing numbers diminishing student quality of life — now seeing overcrowded lecture theatres" NAT Student, NSS 2017

These comments illustrate that students are starting to attribute space and resourcing issues with growing student numbers, rather than in previous years where issues with space has been predominantly due to 'pinch points' throughout the year, such as assessment periods. Some of the comments also stray from focussing specifically on resources to highlighting students fears about the impact of increasing student numbers on the student experience more generally. As mentioned, we recognise that UEA is undertaking several long-term projects regarding spacing, however it is not clear how much of this has been communicated with students and whether there has been any institutional-level statement acknowledging student concerns around increased numbers and the impact on resources. This therefore contributes to one of the recommendations for this theme.

Provision of faith spaces

This is something that we know members of UEA are working with Union Officers and student societies on currently and that separate reports and presentations from the student body and students' union have been circulated to University staff. However, we felt it important to acknowledge it as part of the wider student experience at UEA, hence including it in brief in this Student Experience Report.

As it stands, faith space provision for the Muslim community on campus is not only falling behind standards at other HE institutions, such as Keele¹¹, University of the West of England¹², Exeter¹³ and Nottingham¹⁴, but is also below standards in terms of the basic requirements of Muslim prayer spaces. As UEA expands further to take on more staff and students, so to must it ensure that the requirements of those of all faiths on campus are not compromised as has been the case with the Muslim community.

UEA's page on provisions for the Islamic community states:

*"The University is committed to developing, through our Estates' strategic space planning process, the **permanent** provision of **appropriate** Islamic prayer facilities for the university community. **Consultation** with Muslim student representatives, the Students' Union, the Multifaith Centre and the Muslim chaplain will be carried out before further changes are made."*¹⁵

The three words in bold are where would like to focus specifically. During and in the lead up to the events of the last 3-4 months regarding prayer space, all three highlighted words were compromised resulting in temporary, inappropriate space which came about with no consultation with the bodies listed above. After several months of perseverance and hard work from the Islamic Society at UEA, Muslim students have been promised by the Vice-Chancellor that "the University will work with [UEA Islamic Society] on prayer space"¹⁶. Our recommendation for UEA on this issue centres around this partnership to ensure that Muslim students' needs are met fully and always in consultation.

Recommendations: space and resourcing

1. Plans for staff training on using technology and new resources must be established. This should be as part of systematic training to achieve a basic standard, rather than ad-hoc/optional improvement opportunities.
2. Estates must create a clear communication plan for this to ensure that it is not only known among the student and staff population but used effectively. Awareness of the system should be tested during term one. This should include developing a system for ensuing data gathered is acted on and fed back to students and staff. In addition a programme of proactive auditing should be developed and run rather than just waiting for an issue to be reported.
3. UEA should commit to physical, observational auditing of spaces during busy daytime periods. This would be to establish a better lived reality of space rather than one based on people per square metre.
4. UEA should develop a clear medium-length (2-3 year) expansion management plan, with resourced solutions to issues to do with space, resources and facilities that have been identified among the student body.

¹¹ See <https://www.keele.ac.uk/faith/faithspaces/>

¹² See www.uwe.ac.uk/services/Marketing/students/pdf/.../Multi-Faith-Space-Guidance.pdf

¹³ See <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/chaplaincy/islamic/>

¹⁴ See <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/chaplaincy/islam/prayerrooms.aspx>

¹⁵ Taken from <https://portal.uea.ac.uk/multifaith/faiths/islamic> [accessed 23.9.2017]. Bold type added.

¹⁶ Taken from https://twitter.com/UEA_VC/status/911278451759501314 [accessed 23.9.2017].

5. UEA should conduct research and insight into other institutions' space provision for space on campus and develop a short and long term plan to illustrate how students of all faiths will be supported and accommodated for.
6. Better transparency and regular communication with students on increasing student numbers and the resulting plans for physical expansion should be established.
7. The University should commit to involving students both as users and partners in the planning of capital projects and programs to maximise the value from spending.
8. That given the range of "non teaching/learning" space issues, that student representation be created on the University's Space Management Group.

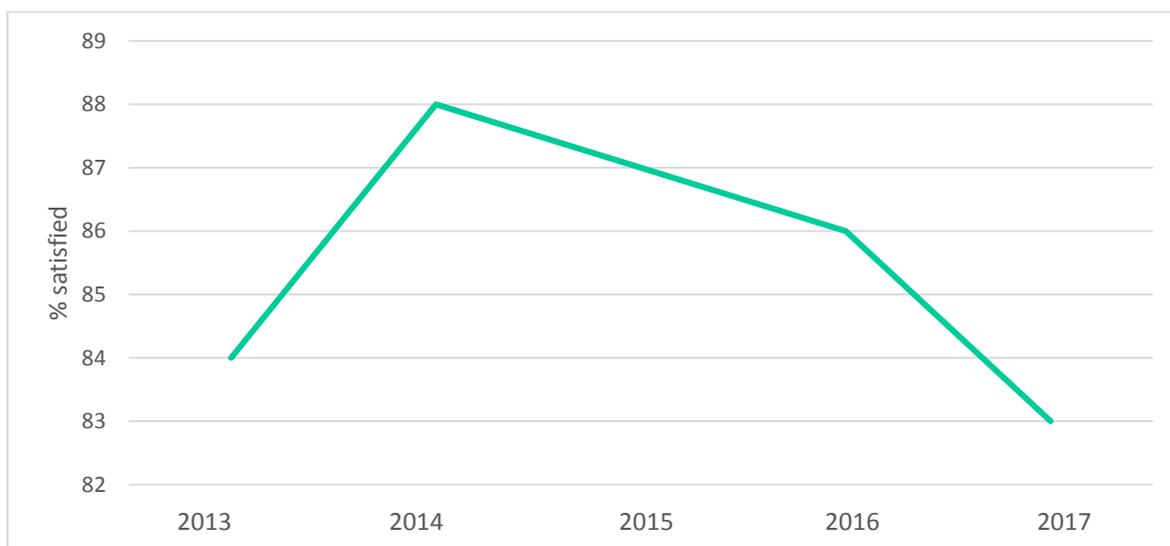
Chapter 4: Support and welfare

The 2017 results of the Guardian's Annual Student Experience Survey found that 87% of first year students struggle to cope with social or academic life¹⁷. This indicates now more than ever that welfare and support is of high priority to students generally, but there are also key indicators that will be explored in this chapter which indicate areas of welfare support at UEA that can be improved. This chapter will explore this in more detail and what UEA can do to improve student welfare.

Academic support

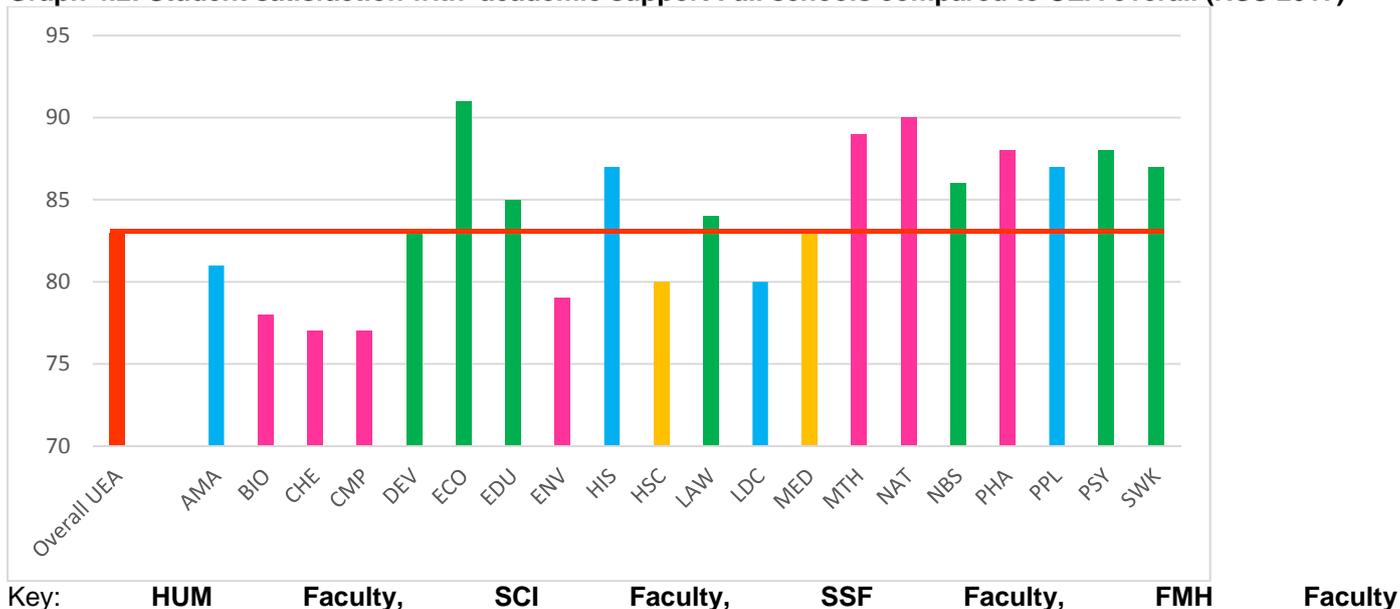
uea(su)'s Student Union Survey 2017 uncovered that out of 16 factors (ranging from money, to mental health, to accommodation), UEA students' highest priority was academic achievement; with 76% of respondents rating it as their number one concern. Despite this, nearly 13% of respondents were dissatisfied with academic support available to them. This is further illustrated by the fact that since 2014 UEA's NSS results have seen a steady decrease in satisfaction with academic support, with the sharpest drop being between 2016 and 2017, as can be seen in graph 4.1 below:

Graph 4.1: Satisfaction with academic support (NSS 2013-2017)



Despite a negative trend in satisfaction with academic support over the last 5 years, there is varying results within UEA generally between schools. This is highlighted by graph 4.2 below:

Graph 4.2: Student satisfaction with 'academic support': all schools compared to UEA overall (NSS 2017)



¹⁷ Statistics sourced from www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2017/sep/07/its-time-for-universities-to-put-student-mental-health-first. Full results at <http://www.upp-ltd.com/student-survey/>

As can be seen, there are some schools with excellent satisfaction which extends beyond UEA's average, and others which are falling short by up to 7 percentage points below UEA's average. This variance is also apparent between Faculties too, with the biggest inter-faculty difference being between NAT and CHE & CMP, with 13 percentage points. This indicates that overcoming any issues of academic support should be approached at a school-base as there is no one faculty with particularly positive or negative results.

It is worth noting that one key factor links with the recommendation about training of academic advisors from the 2016 Student Experience Report on page 10 that should be carried forward. Although there are other factors that feed into students feeling supported academically, academic advisors are a key resource that UEA should put appropriate provisions and training towards.

Of all NSS comments featuring the words 'advisor' or 'adviser', 28% of them were negative. Of these negative comments, over half were specifically about lack of availability of advisors. Some of these comments are illustrated below:

"I have had several advisors for support since starting the degree which has not helped when seeking help with assignments, no continuity." HSC Student, NSS 2017

"Support from staff for example from your personal advisor feels like they cannot give you support as there is too many students" HSC Student, NSS 2017

"I had no contact from my adviser the entire time." BIO Student, NSS 2017

"I have seen my adviser once in my whole degree and he/she has made no effort to contact to arrange a meeting" ENV student, NSS 2017

"I have found it very hard to get in contact with my adviser... It seems to be the case that your adviser is either there for you the entire way or not there at all.... I feel like meetings with your adviser should be compulsory at the beginning and end of every term, or at least the start and end of every year." LDC student, NSS 2017

"Academic staff also need better training on how to deal with mentally unwell students." LDC student, NSS 2017

This shows that it appears there is inconsistency between schools in the support given by academic advisors. This was a theme raised in last year's Student Experience Report based on student comments, and it seems that there is still an issue. Below are comments from students in the same schools as those listed above, providing positive feedback:

"My academic advisor is incredibly helpful and supportive." HSC Student, NSS 2017

"I have been given invaluable support from my academic adviser, student support services and the School of Biological Sciences." BIO student, NSS 2017

"Availability of the counselling service and a personal advisor, that you are able to discuss future opportunities with." ENV Student, NSS 2017

"The personal advisor contact has been fabulous, can't fault them at all." LDC Student, NSS 2017

This illustrates that students within the same schools are having completely different experiences when it comes to academic advisors which brings into question the systems by which advisors are allocated, trained and monitored.

Another factor that has potentially contributed to a decrease in satisfaction of academic support is students' difficulties with deadlines and extenuating circumstances

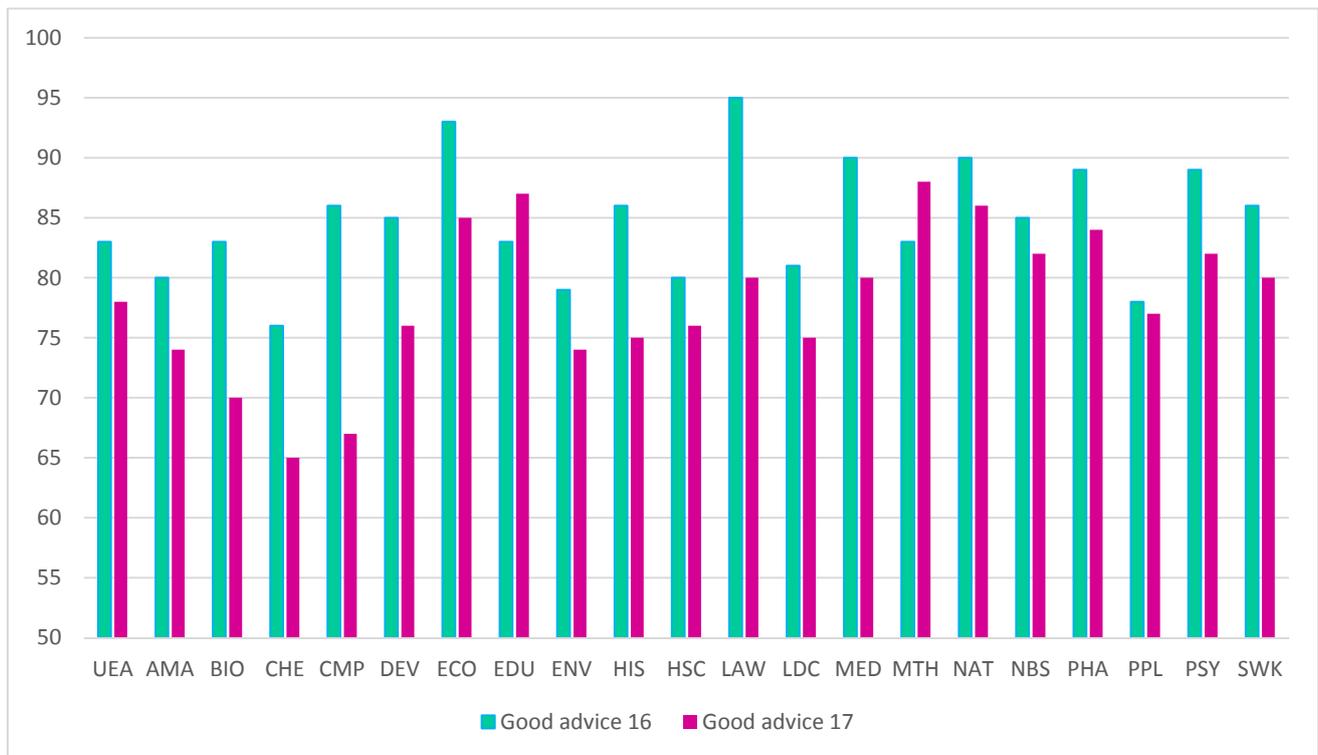
"There is little mental health support in that every time you apply for extension you have to explain everything and fill out a lot of paperwork every time even if you have a long term condition." AMA student, NSS 2017

"Better information on collecting work submitted with an extension and easier access to late submitted coursework." LDC student, NSS 2017

"I even missed an important [dissertation] deadline due to my adviser not informing me of it, even though he/she was sent two reminder e-mails to pass the message on to me" PSY student, NSS 2017

Students have also shown a decrease in satisfaction with support available to them more generally when needing to make study choices, as illustrated by graph 4.2:

Graph 4.2: Agreement that ‘good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course’ (NSS 2016 v 2017)



As can be seen, all schools with the exception of MTH and EDU have seen a decrease in satisfaction with this NSS question. CMP, LAW and BIO have seen the most significant drop, with -19%, -15% and -13% respectively. Although there are a variety of factors that could explain such a dramatic shift, academic advisors could play a key role in providing that advice or at least being a first point of contact for students in need of guidance. UEA should also consider the role of Careers Central and any staff with employability responsibilities within each school. This is particularly pertinent given the upcoming Teaching Excellence Framework report focussing on Graduate Employment as an area of development for UEA.

Mental health and wellbeing support

Nearly 15% of respondents to uea(su)'s Student Union Survey 2017 said that they were dissatisfied with non-academic support at UEA. With the restructure of Student Support Services over the 2016-17 academic year, we recognise that a new approach to student welfare and mental health support is being established; one that centres on embedding mental health and wellbeing support "throughout the University community"¹⁸. Although it is still in the comparatively early stages, with the mental health strategy having been established in April 2017, there are particular areas that we would urge UEA to prioritise over the next academic year.

Firstly is communication and managing expectations. Whilst having a new strategy in place is an excellent step to embedding a new culture around mental health and wellbeing at UEA, we feel that it's imperative that a thorough communication strategy is put in place to ensure that students and staff know what they should be able to expect from Student Support Services. Some comments in the NSS this year indicated students' dissatisfaction with communication from SSS, both in terms of the support available and in terms of follow-ups post-appointment:

"The main areas for improvement in my view are communication and caring for the mental wellbeing of students." PHA Student, NSS 2017

¹⁸ UEA Mental Health Strategy, page 4. Full strategy can be found at file:///C:/Users/thg15dju/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/9510AKJ4/ltc16d127%20divider%20e%20mental%20health%20policy(2).pdf

"Mental health services and support have been mostly non-existent. There's been no checking in or follow ups" LAW Student, NSS 2017

The new strategy highlights updated KPIs for different types of appointments, those being:

"an Initial Consultation (2 weeks); Psychological Practitioner Support (2 weeks); CBT support (4 weeks); counselling support (6 weeks)" Wellbeing

Many comments from students do not quantify the amount of time they have had to wait for appointments, but instead use objective phrases such as "long waiting times":

"Waiting list for counselling is very long." LCD Student, NSS 2017

"Long waiting times to see services at the Student Support Service." PSY Student, NSS 2017

"Sometimes it's a bit frustrating with the length of time it takes for the mental health and learning support services to get back to you" LDC Student, NSS 2017

This indicates that the proposed waiting times for services need to be clearly communicated to students so that they know what to expect and have a way to feedback to the Student Support Services if the reality of their experience falls short of this. This is both to better the student experience but also to allow SSS to get a better understanding of what students want and need from their support service.

Secondly is SSS outreach and collaboration with other UEA departments, including the students' union and peer support societies. As part of the May 2017 update from Student Services¹⁹, activities 17, 25 and 34 (with accommodation, nightline and the students' union respectively) highlight some plans for collaborative work. Whilst this is an excellent start and it is positive to see other stakeholders considered in SSS' plans, UEA should commit to outlining more specifically how the new mental health and wellbeing strategy will be embedded with other stakeholders.

PGT dissertation support

In light of recent research carried out by uea(su), some headline findings indicate that support and information for students on postgraduate taught programmes is falling short of expected standards, particularly in relation to dissertations.

Given the breadth of findings, a separate report on the experience of PGT students will be released once full analysis has taken place. However we felt it important to acknowledge the initial results as part of the Student Experience Report so that appropriate action and fore-warning could take place ahead of the release of the full report.

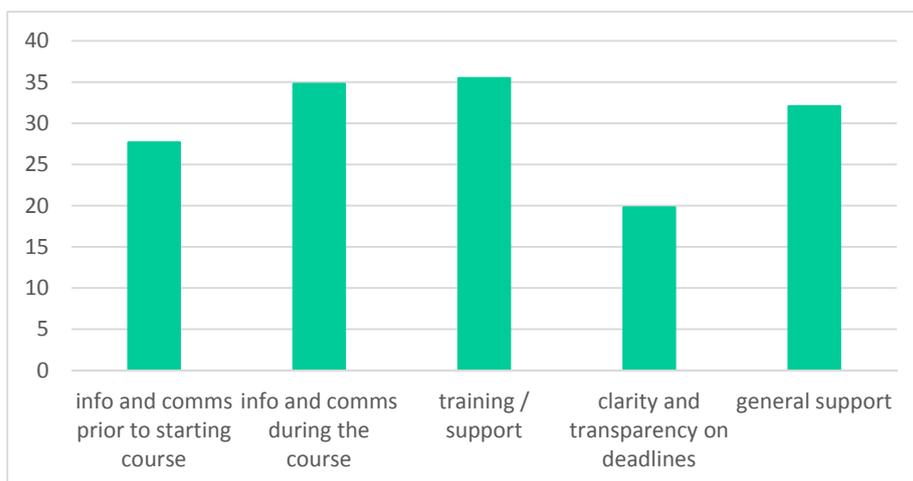
The key findings of the PGT students dissertation experience survey, which was open from 24th July to 20th September, are as follows:

- Nearly 50% of respondents highlighted that the difference between their dissertation submission date and advertised course-end date was more than 3 weeks. This has implications on factors such as work, accommodation and finances, with students making arrangements in line with the period of time advertised only to find the reality is different.
- More than 20% of respondents said that information on their dissertation was not included in either their course or module outlines
- 96% of respondents did not know the deadline for their dissertation proposal before starting the course
- 90% of respondents did not know their overall submission date before starting the course
- Nearly 20% had no research training before or during their Masters course
- Nearly a third of respondents felt mostly or totally unprepared when starting their dissertations
- There were high rates of dissatisfaction with varying levels of support across the dissertation experience (shown in graph 4.3 below):

¹⁹ Can be seen at

<https://portal.uea.ac.uk/documents/6207125/17425092/sec16d037+divider+j+Student+Support+Service+Update.pdf/f299c909-dc82-41a0-9506-a5bbfd17bbde>

Graph 4.3: rates of dissatisfaction (% dissatisfied) with PGT dissertation support



As can be seen, these initial results indicate a worrying level of unpreparedness and lack of support felt by Masters students at UEA. Given that one of UEA’s promises is to: “...work with our Students’ Union to review supervisory and monitoring practices for both postgraduate taught and research students, so we can develop and implement a model of best practice across all schools for consistent and robust postgraduate supervision”, we would be keen to work closely with UEA to ensure the supervisory elements of students’ Masters experience is not compromised.

Student finances

Students nationally are facing ever more difficult decisions to make around student finance, particularly in the context of the government changing the regulations around loads and bursaries. This means that, in the upcoming years, financial support and options will be more limited for those looking to go to University, with the biggest changes being on Health Sciences courses²⁰. Current UEA students and alumni are reporting difficulties with finances without the upcoming changes: nearly 30% of students spoken to as part of a November 2016 Quality Conversation said that they were not informed of or prepared for how much everything would cost at UEA. Some of the reasons given for this included:

a. expected course costs (reading list books, printing)

“Books, that we are told we have to buy but then never use. Its so pointless” HUM Student, QC November 2017

“Textbooks were too expensive and unexpected SSF” SSF Student, QC November 2017

“I knew everything apart from books, because reading lists are always released late” SSF Student, QC November 2017

b. unexpected course costs (extra books, trips)

“So many extra costs incurred with printing and books” HUM Student, QC November 2017

“hidden costs, stuff expected to buy on top of fees” HUM Student, QC November 2017

“No information about costs before came to University” FMH Student, QC November 2017

c. cost of living (food, rent, bills)

“washing and rent are a lot more than i thought. Why does my friend live in the village, have a nicer flat, an oven, and pay the same amount of rent. It is not fair!” HUM Student, QC November 2017

d. extra-curricular activities (sports, gym membership, affiliation fees)

“The cost of sports, SAM and sportspark: over £300 for all activities” HUM Student, QC November 2017

e. travel costs

“Bus travel is so expensive. Why is it more expensive than London!?” HUM Student, QC November 2017

²⁰ See <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/aug/01/my-bursary-was-essential-readers-on-ending-healthcare-training-bursaries>

The range of finance-related issues faced by students at UEA indicates that more needs to be done to support and inform them during their time here. However, that does not seem to be happening despite a recommendation from last year's Student Experience Report being:

"UEA should acknowledge the crisis of student cost of living by:

- i. 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"
- ii. 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"

In this year's NSS comments, 33 students²¹ spoke negatively about their experiences with money and finance, with themes being similar to those outlined on the previous page. With the upcoming national changes, UEA should act to ascertain the reality of UEA students' finances and ways in which better support could be provided.

Recommendations: Support and welfare

1. 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.
2. A review of academic policy management, monitoring and implementation should take place and no new or revised policy should be agreed with a management, monitoring and implementation plan.
3. UEA should acknowledge the crisis of student cost of living by:
 - a. 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"
 - b. 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
 - c. A strategic review of the student financial picture at UEA should be developed to inform decision making
 - d. A single committee that includes student representation should oversee all charges/fees levied on students
4. UEA should work with the SU and NCC to develop a plan that ensures that on and off campus accommodation is sustainable and appropriate, in terms of quality and price and availability.
5. UEA should review information provided to students around academic support, setting out clearly the standard of what they can expect. This should include centralised provision through SSS, provisions within their school (such as academic advisors), and support via the students' union.
6. UEA should establish a clear policy on PGT Dissertation Supervision, making clear to students what they can expect and reflecting on the findings of the SU's forthcoming research on the issue
7. A robust communication plan for the Mental Health Strategy must be established to ensure that all students and staff members are not only aware of it but have clear expectations for UEA's mental health provisions.
8. SSS should set out plans detailing how they plan to work with other UEA departments to fulfill the new mental health plan, including UEA professional services, Students' Union's Advice service, academic advisors and Nightline.
9. A full review of student access to medical and healthcare services and charges should be carried out before any decision to remove Medical Centre subsidy is taken, which regardless of how targeted should remain at at least the current budgeted level.
10. SSS, SU, UMS and SportsPark should collaborate on a University Wide Healthy Campus Plan building on work in schools, colleges and University

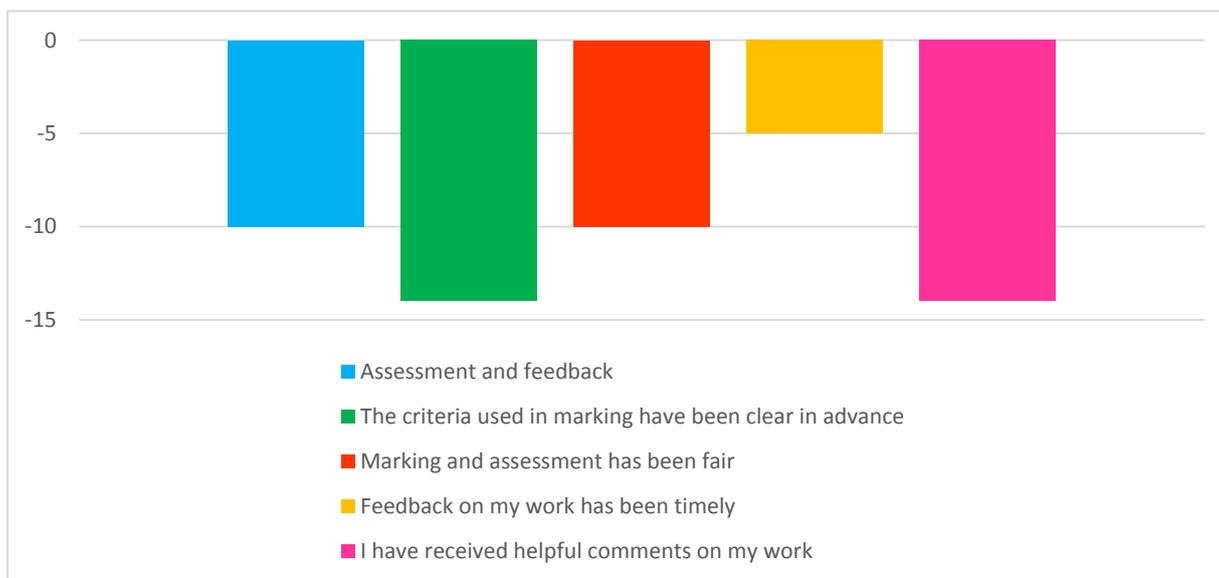
²¹ Comments were filtered to find those containing 'money' OR 'finance' OR 'cost' OR 'expense' OR 'price'

Chapter 5: Assessment and feedback

Assessment and feedback has been an area that UEA has struggled with consistently over the last few years, with both positive and negative fluctuations in many different aspects. This year, however, it is by far the weakest area of the NSS results in comparison to the sector, particularly for question 11: 'I have received helpful comments on my work' where UEA had 69.2% satisfaction compared to the sector average of 74.4%.

This difference is also very apparent when comparing UEA's scores to the top quartile where, again, assessment and feedback has the biggest gap. Graph 5.1 below shows this year's difference:

Graph 5.1: percentage difference between UEA and the top quartile for Assessment and Feedback (NSS 2017)



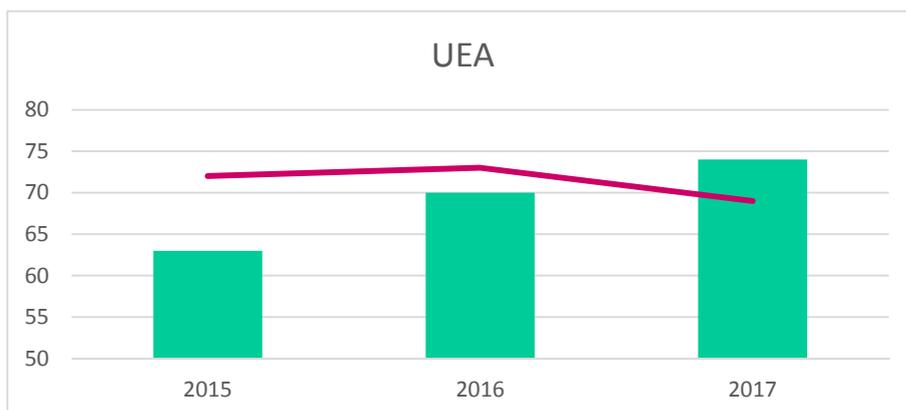
For all other NSS questions, the biggest difference between UEA and the top quartile is -7%, so as the graph illustrates the results for assessment and feedback present a significant difference.

This chapter will explore further different elements of assessment and feedback that we feel should be a key focus for UEA this year.

Timeliness v quality

UEA has worked particularly hard over the last few years on improving timeliness of feedback return due to particularly low results in 2014 and 2015's NSS. This resulted in a 7% increase in satisfaction in "feedback on my work has been prompt" between 2015 and 2016, and a further 4% increase between 2016 and 2017. However, with the improvement of student satisfaction with timeliness of feedback return has come a downturn in satisfaction of the quality of feedback, as illustrated by graph 5.2 below:

Graphs 5.2: timeliness and quality of feedback (NSS 2015-2017)



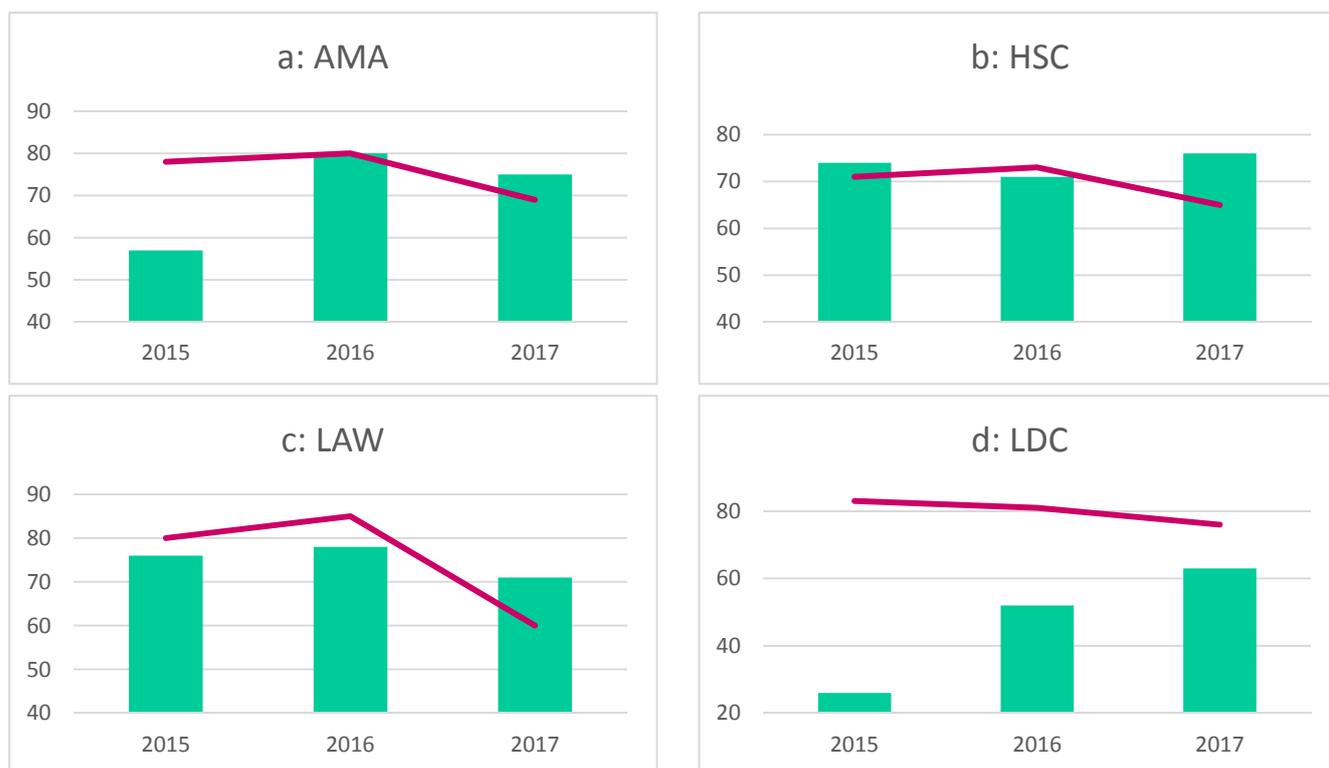
The implications of improved timeliness of feedback is something that was a concern of representatives from across the University at the time when improving timeliness was of immediate priority. A paper from October's 2015 Learning and Teaching Committee contained the following quotes:

"The School is concerned about the trade-off between timeliness and satisfaction with the quality of feedback" LCD

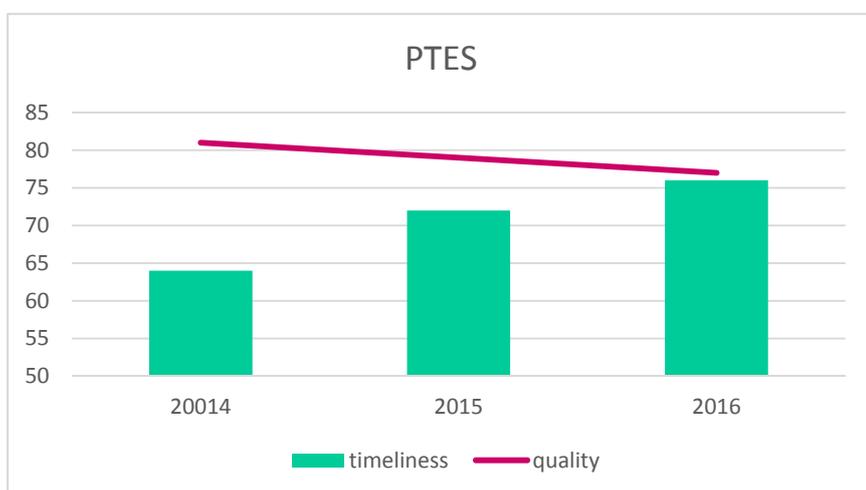
"Without increased staff resource ... feedback quality will be at risk" BIO

The results over the last three years have indicated that some academics' fears have come to fruition. This is not just the case at UEA generally, but can also be illustrated at a school level by graphs 5.3a-d overleaf:

Graphs 5.3a, b, c and d: satisfaction with timeliness and quality of feedback by school (NSS 2015-2017)



The above schools represent those with a particularly strong correlation between increasing satisfaction with timeliness and decreasing satisfaction with quality of feedback. As can be seen, these are schools across three of the four Faculties indicating that this is a trend present across the University rather than being limited to just one area. This is also the same in Postgraduate Taught study, with the PTES results for assessment and feedback between 2014 and 2016 indicating the same trend:



Graph 5.4: Satisfaction with timeliness v quality of Assessment and Feedback (PTES, 2014-2016)

Student comments in this year's NSS survey endorse these figures, with students from a variety of schools highlighting poor quality of feedback:

“Even though there is a standard senate scale for making, it feels that the markers are often marking on their opinion and rarely give constructive feedback. More often than not, the essays I receive back have got no annotations so it is impossible to see how to improve or what my strengths are.” AMA Student, NSS 2017

“Feedback/justification for mark often missing or unhelpful.” BIO Student, NSS 2017

“Some marking and feedback has not been explained and has not been considered completely fair.” CHE Student, NSS 2017

“... feedback has been limited and not what I would have expected.” EDU Student, NSS 2017

“Assessments need to be better explained and feedback needs to be more thorough so it is easier to build upon it.” HSC Student, NSS 2017

“Poor feedback when it comes to written feedback such as portfolio/SSS feedback. For example, my most recent feedback was written in board mark and said 'good work'... In contrast, my intercalation year at Southampton University... provided feedback that filled many A4 sheets for each and every bit of coursework.” MED Student, NSS 2017

“Sometimes, marks are deducted without any indication as to why or where they were lost. There are no useful comments to help students to improve” MTH Student, NSS 2017

“Often find coursework feedback sheets are minimal. Several essays have been handed back with no notes/feedback at all, just the grade boundaries I fall in to.” PSY Student, NSS 2017

Despite warning from academics, as highlighted by the quotes from October's LTC on page 38, it appears that UEA have not accounted for the extra work that goes into providing a consistent quality of feedback whilst improving timeliness. Although satisfaction with quality of feedback is not as low as that of timeliness was before UEA prioritised it, uea(su) fears that if the amount of resource available to staff continues to be the same then satisfaction with quality of feedback will continue to decrease.

Inconsistency

Another issue linked to quality of feedback is student opinion on inconsistency in marking style and quality. This was something that was highlighted as an issue in last year's Student Experience Report, and is one of the recommendations from last year's Student Experience Report that should be carried forward to this year. However, we are highlighting this specifically again in this report due to the potential link to the decrease in satisfaction with overall quality of assessment, and the fact that the number of comments indicating dissatisfaction with the consistency of feedback implies that very little demonstrable action has been taking over the last academic year.

Some of the comments below indicate more specific issues with inconsistency of feedback:

“some lecturers only write a small, handwritten paragraph as feedback which is hard to decipher (however, others do a good job in providing full A4 page, typed feedback)” LDC Student, NSS 2017

“I'd like the feedback and marking to be standardised. Difficult to read at times” AMA Student, NSS 2017

“[formative feedback] can be quite mixed depending on who has read the formative compared to who is marking the summative” AMA Student, NSS 2017

“The difference in marking techniques between modules — you will get similar appraisals and positive feedback but different modules there are an inconsistency.” ECO Student, NSS 2017

“It has been noted that assignment grades are very dependent on the marker. For example, what one marker looks for in an essay another does not. Students find themselves deliberately adhering to what that marker likes (such as style or the use of specific references) in order to gain more marks.” HSC Student, NSS 2017

“Huge differences in the quality of marking particularly relating to options including unfair examination practises” Comment from PTES 2016

“Very erratic marking. I don't actually really know how to improve because a lot of the marking across modules is contradictory” LDC student, NSS 2017

"We were often given conflicting advice from different members of staff regarding the same assignment — almost made it feel as though the grade received was 'luck of the draw'" PSY student, NSS 2017

These comments illustrate inconsistency both in terms of:

i. format of feedback
whether handwritten or typed, amount of feedback written, etc.

ii. Style of marking
whether standardised or not, varying between lecturers, varying between modules, etc.

This indicates that inconsistent practice is taking place both between and within schools. Whilst we understand that different schools require different types of marking and feedback types, UEA centrally should encourage schools to practice consistent marking and mandate them to put steps in place to achieve this.

100% assessments

An issue for students across UEA is 100% assessments, either exams or coursework. The comments below from this year's NSS results indicate that, across a variety of schools and Faculties, there is dissatisfaction among the student body with these type of assessments:

"A lot of pressure was put on second years with the year being assessed by 100% exams" PPL student, NSS 2017

"Many assignments were 100% of the mark of the module despite being on topics more than 70% of the class was new to and learning for the first time." ENV student, NSS 2017

"I didn't like the fact that we had to produce one piece of coursework that counts for 100% for each module — I wish that is something they could have changed." LCD student, NSS 2017

"100% pieces of coursework pile too much pressure on students and mean that one lapsed grade has a hugely detrimental effect on the whole three years." LDC student, NSS 2017

"100% of the work was marked by just one coursework" LAW student, NSS 2017

Although we understand that there is often reason and merit for 100% assessments, there should be further scope for preparing and supporting students through these type of assessments. We also believe that, where modules have 100% assessments, there must be reasonable justification made by the module lead. Where there is not justification as to why a 100% assessment is necessary, course leads should review the assessments to ensure that they are as appropriate as possible.

Exam timetabling

A theme that came through in this year's NSS comments was around the grouping of exams, with students from many schools highlighting dissatisfaction at having had multiple exams across a short space of time. This is arguably an issue which could fit into several of the chapters within this report, given the width and depth of both factors leading to poor exam timetabling and the resulting effect on students. There are four particular areas within exam timetabling which are a concern to uea(su):

1. Resourcing and space: it is likely that exams are having to be bunched together so tightly because of increasing student numbers meaning that there is minimal flexibility on accommodating students in exam spaces over exam period.

"In my third year exam, I had my 5 assessments in 5 consecutive working days. This is nonsense, inhumane and disappointing even when the school knows of this, it still happened without changing the timetable."

PHA student, NSS 2017

"Last year [we] had a really poor timetable for exams, even after being talked to them weren't changed" NAT student, NSS 2017

"More effort should be put into spacing out assessments (e.g., not three coursework deadlines on the same day, and not 5 exams in a week)." CHE student, NSS 2017

2. Feedback timeliness and quality: As illustrated by some student comments, the return time on exam feedback is particularly slow if students' exams are very close together. It is likely that this is because staff are facing high numbers of papers to mark in a short space of time.

"They haven't traditionally been very good at getting exam feedback to students in the time they said. Sometimes, it can be a month but they have improved." MED student, NSS 2017

"Better-structured feedback on practical exams would be beneficial. ." MED student, NSS 2017

3. Student wellbeing: many of the comments indicate the resulting stress caused as a result of bunching of exams. Of course, any form of assessment can be stressful for students, however multiple exams in a short space of time appear to be particularly detrimental to student wellbeing. This is something that could be avoided if there was scope for exams to be better spaced out.

"Exams timetabling, especially in third year literally killed my motivation... Just some context we had 5 in a row, and even though this is the only exam period I've been properly prepared, I still scored lower than when I've started revision a day or two before due to mental fatigue" PHA student, NSS 2017

"The extent of the course content with exams and the time of the deadlines are mostly around the same time, it puts a massive amount of pressure and stress on students." BIO student, NSS 2017

"Having three exams in one day I feel, it's really stressful and results in students have more poor grades because of not having enough time." HSC student, NSS 2017

"Enough support has not been given on essays, placement, and exams. (Especially resits, no support was offered nor given when asked)." HSC student, NSS 2017

Recommendations: Assessment and feedback

1. 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.
2. Utilizing the NUS Assessment and Feedback benchmarking tool, an action plan should be agreed and monitored at University level in every school to ensure that there are improvements.
3. A revised, shortened and simplified Assessment Feedback policy should be developed and approved at Senate with a focus on standards that students can expect, rather than guidance for academics.
4. Training on feedback practice for academics with students SPLD stickers should become mandatory.
5. UEA should conduct a review of all 100% assessments to ascertain where there might be courses with particularly high amounts of 100% assessments. In cases where students may have to be completing more than one 100% assessment per year, course leaders should be mandated to provide commentary on the reasons for this weighting.
6. A review of space available and the exam timetabling system should take place to try to ensure that students on courses with exam-heavy assessments are not having to take more than 3 exams on 3 consecutive days.
7. Individual exam feedback pilots should be built upon to move to full roll out as soon as possible.
8. A full review of Senate marking scales should be carried out to determine and fix barriers to understanding amongst students.
9. Genuine anonymous marking should be implemented immediately given the pre-existing Senate policy on the issue.

Chapter 6: General recommendations

There are several points to include in this shorter chapter on issues that have arisen over the last academic which do not fit into any of the themes within this report. We have broken them down into 4 sub-themes: transition, equality and diversity, personal development and expectations. We wanted to ensure, however that these were included in this report to ensure that UEA staff are aware of them and can thus take appropriate action. As you will notice, many of these themes are based around national research or insight, all of which are referenced in the footnotes.

Transition

A Quality Conversations with students held in March 2017 was on the topic of extra opportunities for students, including Do Something different and a “week 0”. 50% said that they would prefer a non-academic timetabled first week in order for them to settling in and orientate themselves both to campus and to student life. Some of the comments stated:

“It would be nice to have a week for new students to settle in and explore what UEA has to offer”

“It would be more useful to have a transition than disrupt learning part way through the year”

“It’s more important to have week 0 to get acquainted with the university when you first come to a new uni”

“Gives students the opportunity to get to know each other without the stress of being in a new place and starting lectures straight away”

“Need time to get used to surroundings and feel comfortable”

“Starting the academic year straight away can be stressful”

These comments indicate a desire among students for a period of time at the beginning of semester to explore UEA in their own time, rather than lectures and academic teaching starting too soon. Many students will have not even have moved into their new accommodation before having to navigate campus for the start of the academic year. Research conducted by Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) on student perceptions²² had a section on social integration, where nearly 50% of respondents said they felt completely or somewhat unprepared to live with people they had never met before²³. Part of the anxieties associated with meeting new people could lie around not having time to get to know flatmates properly, something closely linked with going straight into academic study after moving in. Having clear and structured time to get know flatmates could offset this somewhat.

It is also worth nothing, however, that a transition period is also important for the non-traditional first year students; those such as mature or commuting students who may not be living on campus. Part of HEPI’s report focussed on mental health of new students in the first 4 weeks of study²⁴. The results indicated strongly that over 90% of students are likely to feel tired, lacking in energy, or under strain in these first weeks. Having a week 0 without teaching would allow students the flexibility of making their first week as a student what *they* want it to be within their own interests and capabilities.

It would be beneficial for UEA to explore the possibility of a consistent, institution-wide approach to transitioning new students into University life. An example of this is the ‘I love HUM’ initiative. Although this includes elements of academic study and timetabled events, uea(su) is really impressed with the balance of more social and orientation-based events with lectures and seminars. It creates a fantastic community of HUM students, but also allows some flexibility for them to explore campus and adjust to their new lives. Best practice would, surely, be to have similar initiatives for all Faculties, to ensure consistency and a fair start for all student.

Another element of transitions for students is those going from UG to PG study at UEA. uea(su) has noticed several examples of issues within this transition period, including students’ UG emails being turned off once they finish, even if they are carrying on to PG study. This can create many problems for students, including missing valuable information and causing inconsistency in their student experience. UEA’s advertisements for PG study use the phrase “stay where you are”, but it is very difficult for students to feel part of a smooth and well-managed transition if the simplest of things, such as a continued email and IT account, cannot be provided.

²² Full report at <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/2017/07/04/reality-check-report-university-applicants-attitudes-perceptions/> [accessed 20.9.2017]

²³ See p. 22 of report

²⁴ See p. 16 of the report

Equality & Diversity

There are many elements of equality and diversity where UEA falls short. Although much of this is likely to be known, we wanted to raise it as a point within this report in order to try to best take action and move forward.

In UEA's access agreement for 2017-18²⁵, there are some key areas of particular concern, which we are highlighting to link to our recommendations made later in the chapter.

Disabled students in particular are subject to inequality in comparison to other student groups at UEA. The access agreement highlights 3 areas for concern for disabled students²⁶: access (entrants), success (non-continuation) and success (good honours). Success (non-continuation) is the only amber area across all characteristics in the agreement, indicating that there are needs specific to disabled students that are not being fully met at UEA. This could be both physical, mental or learning disability, indicating that UEA may need to carry out further investigatory research to ascertain the needs of disabled students. One area that we feel particularly passionate about, however, is better use of classroom technologies such as lecture capture. This could transform the educational experience of students who find it difficult to take in large pieces of information at a time, or who struggle to attend all lectures due to access issues.

It's also important that UEA reviews types of assessment available to students, in line with some of the recommendations from chapter 5. We have spoken previously about the effect that exams and bunching of assessments can have on student wellbeing, but it is also important to consider this in the context of different learning and assessment style required by those with varying needs.

Personal Development

National research suggests that students increasingly view social action as a key component of the student experience. The Students' Union survey, however, suggested otherwise - UEA students regard this this aspect of the UEA student experience as the least satisfying from a suite of thirteen elements. This disparity between national student trends and attitudes towards social action and the trends and attitudes of UEA students indicates that UEA should be doing more to promote the importance of personal development to its students.

The results of the Students' Union survey isn't the only indicator of UEA's lacking urgency towards personal development, with both the results of the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes²⁷ and Destination of Leavers of Higher Education²⁸ survey being poor. This is also taking into account the fact three of UEA's largest schools, MED, HSC and EDU, offer vocational courses, such as PGCEs and Health degrees, which may help to boost the results of such surveys.

We recognise that each school, and even courses within schools, have different requirements and expectations for personal development and that its meaning is objective and personal. However, we would love to see UEA developing further initiatives for school-based, targeted work on providing all students with appropriate opportunities.

uea(su) is committed to providing students extra-curricular development opportunities during their time at UEA, whether through volunteering, paid work or committee membership. Our LeadChange programme, established in February 2017, is in early stages but is already seeing positive changes in terms of student self-awareness and development. This can be exemplified by the results of a survey completed by students before and after attending our Student Transformation Weekend over 9th and 10th September: agreement with the statements "I can identify transferable skills in most daily activities" and "the SU is all about learning new skills" increased by 63% and 75% respectively.

We are passionate about not only broadening this out further, but working with UEA to do so in order to hopefully better the personal development opportunities available to students.

Expectations

With factors such as the increasing fees and a shift to students being viewed as 'consumers', students' expectations of their University experience are changing. The HEPI report on student perceptions²⁹ uncovered some very interesting points which UEA should take heed of and apply to managing student expectations at UEA.

A first key point to note is the discovery that 61% of students felt anxious about going to University³⁰. Whilst anxiety and nervousness is common and understandable, this is something that can be offset with clear, correct and transparent

²⁵ Available at <https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/The%20University%20of%20East%20Anglia%201718.pdf>

²⁶ See table on p.3 of OFFA agreement

²⁷ Full results at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/graduate-outcomes-for-all-subjects-by-university>

²⁸ See <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/innovation/records/reviews/newdlhe>

³⁰ See p. 7 of the report

information from the University prior to students starting. This would also help to manage expectations of what students should anticipate for their course and University experience – on anything from the amount of teaching time they will be receiving, to their expectations for the University generally as may be outlined in a student charter.

In the HEPI report, research was also carried out on the influence that an institution with a TEF Gold rating would have³¹.

75% of respondents said that a University having a Gold rating is either somewhat or very important to them. It is fair to say, therefore, that students' expectation of a Gold-standard University are likely to be higher than that of silver or bronze. Given that UEA have now achieved Gold, they therefore need to match the expectation and reality that prospective students have of their experience here. Provision of information available to students is incorporated into UEA's Access agreement³², so we recognise that this is something UEA is aware of and working towards. It is vital that the elements that are part of this section of the agreement, along with our suggestions in this report, are delivered on.

Part of uea(su)'s induction talk to schools during the first week of semester is around student rights and the academic aspects of University life that we advocate for: we are really trying to allow students to feel supported throughout their time at UEA if they feel that their expectations do not match up to the reality.

PTES

We would recommend that the suggestions found in the BIU PTES report be converted to formal recommendations for response:

The University should consider:

- Methods to address areas of lower satisfaction among specific student types, including FMH, PGR and disabled students.
- Reviewing areas of the Arrivals experience which have seen declines in satisfaction (procedures for payments, the General Student Handbook).
- As in previous years, reviewing induction activities and information to help students settle into life and studying at UEA.
- Reviewing all aspects of the I love Arts & Humanities blackboard site.
- Reviewing the information which is sent out to new students regarding choosing and settling into accommodation.
- Improvements to the cleaning, maintenance and cost of accommodation.
- Continuing work to improve the process of coursework submission (including understanding of how and when marked work will be returned, particularly in ENV, HUM, LDC and MED).
- Reviewing the specific IT and Library help and support facilities which have seen a decline in reported usefulness since 2015.
- Reviewing access to food, drink and toilets in the Library.
- Reviewing the on-campus wireless network in terms of access, speed and reliability.
- Continuing work/research to improve the emails which are sent to students by the Careers Service.
- How to encourage increased usage of Academic Advisors, particularly in CMP, ECO and NBS.
- As in previous years, continue to improve the accessibility of counselling and mental health support.
- Methods to improve student satisfaction with the cost of The Shop and catering outlets.

Recommendations: General

- 1) All faculties be mandated to run "I love HUM" style programmes with central coordination for University wide activities and initiatives. Time created to run a full or partial "Week 0" with review of academic year to facilitate.
- 2) All students should be offered training on independent directed learning; financial literacy and budgeting; dealing with emergency household situations; resilience skills; sexual harassment/discrimination
- 3) To undertake a university-wide review of school-based support for students' transition to postgraduate taught and research level study, in partnership with students, the PGR Service, professional services and the Students' Union
- 4) A strategy group should consider the needs of particular groups who are more likely to find the transition challenging, such as first in- family applicants, applicants who identify as LGBT+, and applicants from particular socio-economic backgrounds
- 5) UEA to utilise expertise within and outside of the University to provide staff with resources and training that will support their curriculum development work from an E&D perspective.

³¹ See p.13 of the report

³² See page 15 of <https://www.offa.org.uk/agreements/The%20University%20of%20East%20Anglia%201718.pdf>

- 6) UEA to commit to systematically reviewing course content to identify opportunities to negate cultural bias through, for example, the inclusion of multi-cultural and multi-racial perspectives, women's experiences, LGBT history, and the use of gender neutral and non-heteronormative language.
- 7) Approval and revision of programmes should include reference to the access needs of disabled students, including opportunities for students to demonstrate that they have attained the required learning outcomes through alternative methods of assessment.
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- 16) Better information should be provided about student welfare and the mental health services that are available, and how these services operate;
- 17) A full campus and city orientation should be built into every new student start.
- 18) The University should take proactive steps to inform students of their rights in relation to their relationship with the University and the student contract.
- 19) The University should convert suggestions from BIU in its PTES report into formal recommendations for response

Conclusion

The themes within this report indicate the extensive breadth of current issues at UEA in a variety of areas. It can, however, be seen that there is a feeling underpinning this year's report of a lack of demonstrable action from the recommendations of last year. Although we have acknowledged that not all recommendations are able to be fully completed in one academic year, the ones that have rolled forward to this year represent those where we feel that more could have been done to make better progress than has been achieved.

UEA's predominant challenge for the 2017/18 academic year is to communicate and embed strategic work, which exists but has not yet seemingly reached the student population. Transparency about their plans, goals and visions for all themes within this report is of upmost importance, particularly when trying to manage student expectations and maintain clear and consistent communication.

Working with other University departments and ensuring that student feedback and input is sought is paramount to this.

As mentioned previously, the next few academic years provide much uncertainty for the student experience of those attending Higher Education Institutes nationally. In order to maintain a positive student experience for UEA students, the University must endeavour to focus on putting students at the centre of all decisions.

Summary of recommendations

Progress from last year's Student Experience report (those not included within other recommendations)

1. UEA should carry out a systematic review of user satisfaction of hubs to establish more specific areas of (dis)satisfaction
2. Improvement plans for schools with below 80% satisfaction for communication (AMA, BIO, CMP, EDU, ENV, HSC, LDC, MED, MTH, NAT, PHA, SWK) should be established and these schools mandated to report on progress at each Learning and Teaching Committee.
3. Investigatory work should be undertaken to explore what, beyond zoning, students want from their timetabling experience and factors which can help or hinder success- particularly for groups with poorer success rates- with an action plan put in place.
4. UEA should commit to physical, observational auditing of spaces during busy daytime periods. This would be to establish a better lived reality of space rather than one based on people per square metre.
5. The University should cause specific work, school by school, to engender diversity and inclusivity in teaching curriculums in higher education with appropriate training. Any new courses, revised courses or module revisions should trigger E&D content review.
6. We expect to see the access agreement properly devolved (not merely disseminated); a school by school action plan on any issue where an achievement or success gap has been identified should be collected via LTC.
7. 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
8. A robust communication plan for the Mental Health Strategy must be established to ensure that all students and staff members are not only aware of it but have clear expectations for UEA's mental health provisions.
9. 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.

Recommendations: Student voice and representation

1. Dedicated staff capacity for student representation in similar and competitor institutions should be identified, with a view to identifying appropriate investment at UEA.
2. A significant, targeted spend on representation systems including staff capacity and marketing and rewards such as representative clothing
3. Alongside institution-level actions being put into place for common concerns within underperforming schools, specific work should be defined and the implementation of this properly monitored at a faculty and institutional level. Each school should be required to develop an action plan responding to their NSS performance. This should be shared with the SU allowing for student representatives to input into addressing feedback rather than being only updated on progress against pre-defined goals.
4. To review the Student Charter in light of findings from the uea(su)/TSEP work carried out over summer 2016.
5. Centralised leadership on the communication, embedding and reviewing of the updated Representation Code of Practice should be established.
6. UEA strongly encourage all module and course leaders to provide information on the results of previous feedback collected when putting out a module evaluation.
7. The Postgraduate Research Office should put in place plans for reviewing the PGR representation system before the next PRES in 2019, including specific and tangible goals.

Recommendations: Space and resourcing

1. Staff training for technology and new resources must be established. This should be as part of systematic rather than ad-hoc improvement opportunities.
2. Estates must create a clear communication plan for this to ensure that it is not only known among the student and staff population but used effectively. Awareness of the system should be tested during term one. This should include developing a system for ensuing data gathered is acted on and fed back to students and staff. In addition a programme of proactive auditing should be developed and run rather than just waiting for an issue to be reported.
3. Whilst short and long term needs and visions have been established, UEA should focus on developing medium-length (2-3 year) solutions to issues to do with space, resources and facilities that have been identified among the student body.

4. UEA should provide clear short (1 year), medium (2-3 years) and long (3+ years) plans for the provision of PGR space, both academic and non, with demonstrable evidence.
5. UEA should commit to physical, observational auditing of spaces during busy daytime periods. This would be to establish a better lived reality of space rather than one based on people per square metre.
6. UEA should conduct research and insight into other institutions' space provision for space on campus and develop a short and long term plan to illustrate how students of all faiths will be supported and accommodated for.
7. Better transparency and regular communication with students on increasing student numbers and the resulting plans for physical expansion should be established.

Recommendations: Support and welfare

1. 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
2. UEA should acknowledge the crisis of student cost of living by:
 - a. 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"
 - b. 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
 - c. A strategic review of the student financial picture at UEA should be developed to inform decision making
 - d. A single committee that includes student representation should oversee all charges/fees levied on students
3. UEA should work with the SU and NCC to ensure that off campus accommodation is sustainable and appropriate, in terms of quality and price and availability.
4. UEA should review the information provided to students around academic support generally and what they can expect. This should include centralised provision through SSS, provisions within their school (such as academic advisors), and support via the students' union.
5. A robust communication plan for the Mental Health Strategy must be established to ensure that all students and staff members are not only aware of it but have clear expectations for UEA's mental health provisions.
6. SSS should set out plans detailing how they plan to work with other UEA departments to fulfill the new mental health plan, including the Students' Union's Advice service, academic advisors and Nightline.

Recommendations: Assessment and feedback

1. 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.
2. Utilising the NUS Assessment and Feedback benchmarking tool, an action plan should be agreed and monitored at University level in every school to ensure that there are improvements
3. UEA should conduct a review of all 100% assessments to ascertain where there might be courses with particularly high amounts of 100% assessments. In cases where students may have to be completing more than one 100% assessment per year, course leaders should be mandated to provide commentary on the reasons for this weighting.
4. A review of space available and the exam timetabling system should take place to try to ensure that students on courses with exam-heavy assessments are not having to take more than 3 exams on 3 consecutive days.

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