

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHAMPTON TEF 2023 STUDENT SUBMISSION

1.1 CONTEXT

The University of Northampton Students' Union (NSU) is the primary student representation body associated with The University of Northampton (UON). The organisation is led by a team of four elected Sabbatical Officers – President, Vice President Education, Vice President Welfare and Vice President Activities. Any student enrolled directly through UON, on all levels of study (3-8), is eligible for NSU membership, which currently includes around 17,600 students (this does include partner students). NSU also operates at UON's London (UONL) campus, with over 1000 student members based there. Since September 2019, students automatically become members of NSU as part of the enrolment process, entitling them to access a range of services including student representation. This submission primarily focuses on students whose course is delivered directly through UON; this does not include partners such as UONL, a decision that was made due to ease of access to students studying at partners.

In preparation for writing the student submission, a small working group was established within the Students' Union, including the President, Vice President Education and a member of staff supporting academic representation. The working group reviewed pre-existing data, following which they created and led a consultation with students. The student submission was authored by the President, a second-year Sabbatical Officer who was a student at UON from 2017-2021, during which time they were a Course Representative and Faculty Representative. The draft submission was shared with all Academic Representatives, sports and societies members and NSU's Executive Committee, all of whom were invited to provide feedback. In addition, a post was shared on NSU's social media offering students the option to request access to the document if they wished to review it too.

Both the President and Vice President Education were involved in the University's working group for the provider submission and participated in workshops with University colleagues in preparation for the TEF exercise. The University's approach was one of support and trust – they provided access to relevant data to support the student submission, however, were not involved at all in the writing of the student submission, so to maintain independence. At no point did the University unduly influence the content of the student submission.

1.2 APPROACH TO EVIDENCE GATHERING

Evidence for this submission was sourced from a combination of pre-existing sources and some purpose-led consultation with students. The sources of evidence include the following:

- The Student Life Pulse which is a survey administered by Alterline. Each year, the student body is divided into nine groups, with one of the nine groups receiving the online survey per month, October-June each academic year. Each group of students provides a diverse sample regarding characteristics such as faculty, level of study, gender, ethnicity and disability. Data is published monthly and new data is added to the previous x number of months from that academic year to provide a collective response from the student body. The Student Life Pulse has been administered at NSU since the 2019-20 academic year (c. 1000 respondents) with the data from that and subsequent years used to inform this submission: 2020-21 (c. 1800 respondents), 2021-22 (c. 1900 respondents). In some cases, the 2022-23 responses (c. 300 respondents so far) may be referred to as an indicator of trend, building on the previous years. It will be made explicit where this is the case.
- The Big SU Survey is an annual exercise administered internally by NSU and open to all members to participate in. The online survey consists of 53 questions which, whilst primarily focusing on the Students' Union, also addresses some aspects which are more University-specific. NSU has only administered The Big SU Survey in the 2021-22 year so far, therefore any evidence obtained will be treated as supplementary to other evidence gathered.

- In preparation for this submission, NSU's President and Vice President Education also led on focused consultation with students. A series of focus groups were organised and a survey was created – both of which were open to all NSU members, and asked questions which aligned to the aspects addressed by the TEF exercise. In total, 16 students attended focus groups and there were five responses to the survey. Whilst these numbers were lower than expected, the respondents included a mixture of second year, third year and graduate students and covered courses in all three Faculties (courses include Criminology, Computing, Primary Education, Law, Business Studies, Architectural Design, Fine Art, Joint Honours Drama and Politics, and Nursing).

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

2.1 TEACHING, FEEDBACK AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

UON employs an Active Blended Learning (ABL) approach to teaching, feedback and assessment; an approach which helps to scaffold learning through a combination of taught sessions and complimentary sense-making activities. The Student Life Pulse indicates that **79% of students are satisfied with the teaching on their course** (2021/22; 82%, 2020/21; 80%, 2019/20) - a figure that has been maintained throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and a significant cyber-attack in March 2021. In focus groups, students commended ABL as a *'good delivery method'* and appreciated the structure of asynchronous pre- and post-tasks in addition to taught sessions. Where teaching was identified as strong, students spoke of interactive pedagogies, use of a variety of physical and digital resources and an inclusive, supportive environment.

The majority of teaching at UON is in smaller classes, rather than larger, traditional lecture-type sessions. This model, in combination with the ABL approach, allows for a much more personalised experience for students, who note they have *'substantial contact time'* on their course, **'lecturers ensure that each student feels involved'** and smaller group sessions *'allow for students to feel comfortable to ask for help'*. In addition, the use of smaller classes resembles the structure of teaching in schools and colleges; particularly for students who have come straight from further education, UON's use of small-class teaching can support the transition to University due to the familiar configuration. The personalised experience is paramount for UON's students, given the widening-participation nature of the university and large population of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and key to supporting student success.

Alongside teaching practices, the Student Life Pulse results illustrate **75% satisfaction with assessment** (2021/22; 70%, 2020/21; 77%, 2019/20). Assessment types vary across courses, which employ modes of assessment most suited to the nature of the course and are authentic to workplace experiences – a core principle of ABL. For example, a Nursing student in the focus groups had experienced a combination of written and practical simulation assessments; a Drama student took part in assessed performances which were constructed to resemble an authentic theatre performance; and a Primary Education student had assignments which required them to write and deliver lesson plans. Students noted that lecturers deliver specific sessions to introduce assessment items and offer the opportunity for students to ask questions and discuss the given topic; one survey respondent commented, *'the assessments are on topic and challenging but the briefs are always clearly delivered by lecturers'*.

Concern with exams/assignments has been reported between 64% (2022) – 68% (2020/21; 66%, 2019/20) in Student Life Pulse results. Understandably, this concern rose slightly during the prime years affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and peaked in 2020/21 – the year UON also experienced a cyber-attack. Throughout both events, **NSU Sabbatical Officers worked with UON'S Senate to develop a 'No Detriment Policy'** which was introduced in Spring 2020 and retained for the 2020/21 year. This change was incredibly well received by students, many of whom had petitioned for such a policy, and particularly for those whose personal circumstances limited their ability to focus on studies. Whilst some students noted they felt *'at a disadvantage in final year when it comes to exams'*, due to the effects of the pandemic, they recognised that *'lecturers seem[ed] to be trying to provide as much help as they [could]'*.

Similarly, to assessment practice, UON's ABL approach seeks to provide a combination of formative and summative feedback opportunities to support students' progression through each stage of learning. **Satisfaction with 'feedback on my work' was reported as 70%** in the 2021/22 Student Life Pulse results, having fluctuated in the two years prior (67%, 2020/21; 72%, 2019/20). Student consultation around feedback indicated high expectations regarding the quantity and relevance of feedback given by tutors. Responses from the focus groups and survey varied, with some noting **'feedback is bespoke and aligned to the rubric'**; *'we're given extensive feedback, even if we are doing well on assignment which helps us know what to do next'* and *'feedback from assessments is helpful and helps me improve on my assignments and learning development.'* Where students' expectations of feedback on assignments were not met, feedback was said to be *'quite brief'* however, students felt able to contact tutors *'to have discussions regarding feedback on our progress and assignments, which allows us to better adjust our writing for submission in the future'*. Further to this, students – particularly those on courses with practical aspects – recognised the benefits of formative feedback which is *'more immediate and often verbal'*.

In September 2020, UON introduced Anonymous Marking in response to feedback from a survey by NSU into the BME attainment gap and student feedback in the National Student Survey. NSU's survey, conducted during the 2017/18 academic year, indicated that Black students in particular, felt *'[their] work is not graded fairly'* and that *'marking at this Uni tends to be harsh towards people of colour'*. Since its introduction, **Anonymous Marking has sought to bring parity to the assessment and feedback process**. Overall, Anonymous Marking has been well received by the student body and Black student community. In the 2020/21 academic year, some Academic Representatives raised questions about how Anonymous Marking had been implemented, as it does not apply to all assessment items, such as face-to-face observations where anonymity is not possible. The Head of Learning and Teaching Enhancement met with these students to discuss their questions and is continuing to improve the transparency around how the policy is implemented.

2.2 COURSE CONTENT AND DELIVERY

Courses at UON are developed through a CAleRO process – Creating Aligned Interactive education Resource Opportunities. The CAleROs, led by the University's Learning Design team, engage academics and professional services colleagues in a collaborative process which seeks to develop programmes, modules and sessions which are grounded in the ABL approach and allow for effective, participative learning. Within subject areas, **students are also invited to participate in the CAleRO process and shape the design of course content**. All newly developed and re-designed courses are submitted for approval through UON'S Faculty and University-wide Academic Quality and Standards Committees, each of which feature student representatives.

The 2021/22 Student Life Pulse results indicate **82% satisfaction with course content** (78%, 2020/21; 80%, 2019/20). Students in the focus group appreciated how their courses combined *'practical, skills-based'* modules alongside theory, with a particular focus on ensuring *'course content is relevant for [their] future career'*. Further to this, **75% of students were satisfied with 'opportunities to apply [their] learning'** (2021/22 Student Life Pulse; 67%, 2020/21; 71%, 2019/20). Those who spoke most highly of their course content discussed how the progression of modules between levels of study helps *'prepare you for the workplace'* and the most beneficial modules were those which addressed aspects of professional learning such as *'networking'* and *'workplace expectations'*. The majority of students in the focus groups and surveys studied a course with an opportunity to choose some modules which allowed them to *'target the modules they want to do and build the degree into exactly what they want'*. This was recognised as particularly beneficial where courses are broader in nature as students can start to *'specialise in an area they want to pursue'* and have a strong base of information to build upon.

One topic on which there was a consensus from consultation with students was the challenge of their course, with **81% satisfaction with 'intellectual challenge'** in the Student Life Pulse (2021/22; 78%, 2020/21; 81%, 2019/20). It was said that *'a lot is covered in the curriculum'*, *'the content challenges a lot'* and **course content 'highly improved my critical thinking'**. The nature of challenge discussed did vary slightly dependant on whether students were on courses with

Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) accreditation. Those whose courses feature mandatory placements acknowledged the challenge of balancing placement activities with taught sessions and assessments. 56% of Student Life Pulse respondents felt concerned about 'academic workload' (2021/22; 58%, 2020/21; 54%, 2019/20). A Primary Education Course Representative described how their cohort had been concerned that the assessment timetable would result in high-pressure periods due to clashes with placements. However, after discussing this with the module leader, some of the assessment deadlines were moved to a more appropriate time, and the same concern was reviews for other levels of study to reduce the same issue reoccurring.

A core characteristic of course delivery at UON is the use of blended learning – the combination of face-to-face and online teaching and learning. UON has employed a blended learning approach for many years, meaning that the University was in a particularly strong position to adapt its teaching when the COVID-19 pandemic limited face-to-face teaching. There are mixed responses to blended learning among students, which appears to vary largely depending on students' own circumstances, such as whether they are commuter students or have caring or parenting responsibilities. Anecdotally, timetabling is often raised in discussions about blended learning. Growth in student numbers since the move to the Waterside Campus in 2018 and the pandemic have created a high demand for teaching spaces and increased the use of online teaching. Two students in the focus group mentioned online sessions have sometimes been timetabled for the same days as face-to-face sessions, which they find problematic. Despite this, **66% students report satisfaction with 'timetabling'** (Student Life Pulse 2021/22; 66%, 2020/21; 67% 2019/20) and the flexibility afforded by the blended learning approach is well-received. UON also continues to review and optimise space usage to address this issue in the increase of face-to-face teaching, once again.

2.3 USE OF RESEARCH

UON provides opportunities for students to engage in research, both formally through research-based assessment items and with optional schemes such as URB@N (Undergraduate Research Bursaries at Northampton scheme), which provides a £500 bursary for undergraduate students to support a project as a student researcher. There is no specific data in the Student Life Pulse related to research; in the focus group and survey, many students who spoke of research referred to dissertation modules and associated research skills-based modules which helped to prepare for their dissertation. These modules were said to *'help to develop independent research skills'* and *'understand the process that is required when conducting research'* which the students *'anticipate will be helpful for [their] future career'*. A Joint Honours student described undertaking two independent research projects, which *'allowed for exploration of two different research methodologies and approaches'*, which they declared *'intellectually satisfying'*. Students are assigned a supervising tutor for dissertations to help guide them through the research process. **Tutors were said to be 'really helpful' and 'very clearly skilled in these areas'**; there were discrepancies in the amount of support received by supervisors as some students were told they could only meet their supervisor six times, whilst others had weekly review meetings. However, it is reasonable that this could be at least partly explained by students' individual needs, their experience of research and the extent to which they required support from their supervisor.

Aside from dissertations, UON also offers a range of student researcher positions on projects, which enable students to explore topics in more depth and gain additional experience in research. The aforementioned URB@N scheme and UON's Learning and Teaching Innovation Funds have, in total, funded over 200 projects, a majority of which feature paid student researchers. One student in the focus group had worked on an URB@N project investigating the development of Changemaker attributes in student teachers – a theme closely aligned to the University's strategy. They reported, ***'the URB@N project provided my first experience as a paid member of a research project and sparked a love for research.'*** The student has since gone on to co-lead their own research project, published in an international journal based on their URB@N research and chose to continue to further study at UON. A core element of the URB@N and Learning and Teaching Innovation Funds is their inclusion at UON's annual Learning and Teaching Conference, which is attended by around 120 staff, partners and colleagues from local Higher Education

Institutions. Through the Learning and Teaching Conference, student research is disseminated with the wider academic community and helps to inform both academic and professional practice at UON.

2.4 STAFF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND ACADEMIC PRACTICE

Compared to other aspects of teaching and learning at UON, students have less insight into staff professional development and academic practice. However, in saying that, **the University has been incredibly supportive of NSU's student representatives and their involvement in staff development.** In 2022, NSU's Disabled Students' Officer received the award for Student Changemaker of the Year at UON's Changemaker Awards for their work on designing and launching a Carers' Champion training programme, which is now compulsory for some Professional Services Staff. The Disabled Students' Officer founded a Neurodiversity support group for students and has run sign-language sessions for students and staff, with the support of UON's Library and Learning Services. **Staff development such as this helps to engender a community of inclusive and educated staff** who are better equipped to create a similarly inclusive learning environment for students.

The Library and Learning Services also run a series of monthly talks called, 'So here's the thing...' in which staff and students can present on a chosen theme or topic. Sessions are attended by a mixture of students, staff and invited external guests. Whilst these sessions are primarily led by staff, students are invited to deliver a talk and a handful have done so. One student speaker said,

*'Being able to lead sessions like these have not only supported me to increase my own confidence and public speaking abilities, but they have also **enabled me to support staff development through sharing lived experience** as well as opening up on otherwise unspoken or uncomfortable narratives'.*

Another student who attended a session about the impact of physical disabilities in professional environments fed back,

'The session was beneficial in increasing my knowledge of how physical disabilities can affect someone's daily life and highlighted the steps I can take in my professional position to improve the experience for people I work with who have a disability'.

2.5 SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The student support model at UON takes the form of Integrated Learner Support (ILS), which seeks to provide holistic, 'wrap-around' support for students by recognising their individual needs and offering access to bespoke support services. At the start of their course, each student is assigned a Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) who inhabits a tutoring and advising role, encourages social and academic belonging and supports the transition into and through Higher Education. PATs are part of ILS which also includes teams such as Student Support and Advice, Financial Guidance and the Library and Learning Services. In the 2021/22 academic year, NSU administered the Big SU Survey which featured a selection of questions focused on students' engagement with their PATs. The results indicate 76% of respondents knew who their PAT was with 77% of those having engaged with their PAT. Further to this, 96% of students reported that tutorials with their PAT were at least 'moderately effective', with **74% reporting their tutorials were either 'very' or 'extremely' effective.**

Alongside ILS, UON has worked hard to develop a sense of belonging and identity for students and staff at the University. The 2021/22 Student Life Pulse illustrated 57% of respondents 'felt part of a community of staff and students' – a 14% increase on the previous year, with results so far in the 2022/23 year indicating further improvement. NSU's Sabbatical Officers and Course Representatives have worked closely with academic staff to suggest and create social activities for students to get to know others within their cohort and their teaching team. A 2022 History graduate was President of the History Society during their second and third years and collaborated with their lecturers to organise an extra-curricular trip to Hampton Court, which directly related to a module on the History course, as well as organising special guest talks by lecturers on the course. The

society's President noted, *'we have a strong relationship with the History department'* and that the *'society encourages you to meet lots of different people, gain new friendships and develop as a person'*.

Outside of students' immediate subject area, there are a range of services and teams they can access for academic support. A Leather Technology student **commended the 'proactive' and 'very helpful' technicians and support staff** who helped them understand how to use specialist equipment – a comment that was echoed by a Computing student. In the focus groups, students recommended the Academic Librarians who *'came into classes to teach [them] how to do research and academic presentations, they helped to find resources and showed where to search for specific literature'*. In 2021, a Learning and Teaching Innovation Fund project introduced Learning Development Mentors – a team of second- and third-year students who were employed part-time to aid the engagement of other students in seeking support with academic and study skills. The project was stimulated by a recognition that **some students prefer to engage with a peer learning** model rather than seek support from University staff. The Learning Development Tutors (University staff) trained the Learning Development Mentors who work alongside faculty colleagues and students to support and enhance their learning. In 2021/22, 100 students were seen by Learning Development Mentors, with a number of 'at risk' students opting to use the mentors as their preferred option of support.

2.6 USE OF PHYSICAL AND VIRTUAL LEARNING RESOURCES

A combination of physical and digital resources are available to students to support with learning. UON uses NILE – a virtual learning environment – to host course materials, assessment information, submission points and signposting to support services. Students in the focus group and survey *'liked having all the resources in one place on NILE, which sets them out clearly'* and said **the additional information and reading lists on NILE 'enabled independent learning' and 'supported academic development'**. The reading lists in NILE also link to the UON's library database of academic sources and online journals, known as NELSON, which was praised as *'a brilliant database search engine for research and literature'* by one survey respondent. In 2021/22, **79% of students were satisfied with 'library resources'**, a response which has recovered following a 9% decrease in the previous year, possibly impacted by the cyber-attack in March 2021 (Student Life Pulse; 70%, 2020/21; 81%, 2019/20).

Since the move to the purpose-built Waterside Campus in 2018, UON has placed significant emphasis on digital learning and resources. From September 2018, new undergraduate students have been able to choose a benefit upon enrolling with the University, with one option being a laptop. The scheme has been very popular with students and, following feedback from student representatives, UON are reviewing options to be able to offer laptops with higher specifications for those who are on courses which require more advanced software. Student can also loan laptops from the library, which was mentioned by students in the focus group as they said, **'the computers in the library are really good, especially for anyone who doesn't have access at home'**. IT services is an ongoing area of development at UON, with Student Life Pulse results having increased in the last three years following a peak of 72% satisfaction in 2019/20 (70%, 2021/22; 62%, 2020/21 with 74% so far in 22/23).

Students at UON also have access to a range of specialist resources and facilities such as an eSports suite, sports science laboratories and simulation wards complete with life-like mannequins. One Nursing student in the focus groups described the simulation dolls they use which provide *'lots of opportunity to apply learning into practice by practicing things like measuring blood pressure'* and said this subsequently helps to *'increase confidence'*. A Primary Education student referred to the School Experience Library which has a selection of children's books and teaching resources that can be borrowed and taken into schools for teaching placements. The student said, **'the School Experience Library is great as we have access to resources that placement schools might not have, it means we can teach more creative lessons'**. UON continues to invest in additional specialist spaces and resources such as Virtual Reality technology, which can be used by subjects across the University, to enrich student learning experience.

2.7 STUDENT ENGAGEMENT LEADING TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT OF STUDENT EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES

Student voice is embedded across the institution, with NSU leading on formal student representation structures. Two of NSU's elected Sabbatical Officers, including the President, hold student governor positions on UON's Board of Governors as well as membership to the University Senate. Between the team of Sabbatical Officers, they participate in both governance-based committees and project-based steering/working groups including the Student Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Forum; Access and Participation Steering Group; Library and Learning Services Forum and Mental Health Working Group – this list is certainly not exhaustive. In the 2019/20 year, Sabbatical Officers were part of the Critical Incident Group created in response to the escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic; they were similarly included in UON's response to the 2021 cyber-attack. In both of these events, the **inclusion of NSU's Sabbatical Officers demonstrated the University's proactive awareness of the need for a student perspective to contribute to, and shape, decision-making**. Further to this, in the 2021-22 academic year, NSU's President was a member of the Search Group and interview panel to recruit UON's new Vice Chancellor. It is clearly evident from the University's approach and interactions with the SU that University colleagues, including the University's Leadership Team, highly value student voice and invite contributions from student representatives.

Alongside the Sabbatical Officers, UON and SU have worked closely to review and implement a structure of Academic Representatives who represent students on various levels from programme to subject and faculty. In the 2021/22 Big SU Survey, **58% of respondents engaged with their Course Representatives**. Additionally, 52% of students agree that the Students' Union 'effectively represents students' academic interests' (Student Life Pulse, 2021/22; 46%, 2020/21; 46%, 2019/20). Since 2021, an Academic Representation Working Group has met on a quarterly basis, and features Associate Deans from all faculties, the Vice President Education and staff from the Students' Union. This group meets regularly to reflect upon the effectiveness of Academic Representatives and to review Student-Staff Liaison Committee meetings (SSLCs - recently renamed Student Voice Meetings for transparency and clarity). A previous Course Representative (2020-21) commented, '*At SSLC meetings, each and every Course Rep is listened to with due respect and all highlighted cases are scrutinised and tackled*'. Another Course Representative (2019-20) asserted, '*Being a Course Rep has improved both my confidence and communication skills as you have to know how to phrase feedback*'.

Student voice for marginalised communities has also been an area of focus within both UON and NSU. In 2019, NSU introduced a Vice President BME role, funded by UON's Access and Participation funding. The role sought to increase the representation of BME students at the University in an explicit, formal manner. In the 2021-22 academic year, the Vice President Education at the time recognised a lack of ethnic diversity in core student representatives, who particularly lacked representation of students of Black African and/or Caribbean ethnic heritage. In response, a project was developed in collaboration with UON to introduce a team of Black Student Advocates, who would be paid representatives of UON's large Black student community. The Black Student Advocates now hold positions on University committees such as the Student Experience Forum and report directly into the Student Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Forum. Whilst the project is still in the early stages of implementation, **the University's Leadership Team have demonstrated unanimous and unwavering support for the Black Student Advocates** and are using them to gather authentic feedback about Black students' experiences, both academically and otherwise.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

3.1 SUPPORT FOR SUCCESS

UON has a very strong widening participation and raising aspirations ethos, accompanied by a significant demographic of students from traditionally lower-participation backgrounds. Many students may be the first in their family to enter Higher Education, have a lower entry tariff, be returners to education and/or career-changers, each of which bring their own challenges for

navigating academic, professional and personal development throughout a degree. In the 2021/22 Student Life Pulse, **73% of respondents agreed that their 'current activities at University [were] preparing [them] for [their] future career'** (66%, 2020/21; 72%, 2019/2020). In the focus groups, students said their course, *'[was] providing lots of skills that will be needed in future careers'* and *'gave impetus to find out more and engage in work outside of the University'*. Group projects and cross-discipline work with other subject areas, such as Make-Up and Prosthetics students and Drama and Acting students working with Nursing students *'reflects the style of work in industry'* and provide an *'authentic experience of what it's like to work in the environment'*.

3.2 CONTINUATION AND COMPLETION

The Student Life Pulse features a question which asks students, 'For which reasons did you consider leaving University'. In the last three academic years, mental health has consistently been the most frequently chosen response, with the top four responses also including financial difficulties, social experience and other competing responsibilities. None of these responses are particularly surprising given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the more recent economic instability of the country and the subsequent impact of these on the student population. It does, therefore, place a significant responsibility on the University to provide support for these aspects. Alongside this is the recognition of how challenging the transitions into and through Higher Education can be for many students. In the focus group, students acknowledged a *'big step in independence and responsibility from first to second year'* and, in particular, felt unprepared for the increased workload. One student however, commented, ***'The University provides us with all the support but it's up to us on how we utilise it'*** – a sentiment which seems to manifest differently among the student body.

In the 2021/22 academic year, UON's Access and Participation Manager developed a programme entitled 'Stepping Into University', which addresses a students' journey from applying to University through to the end of the first term; a follow-up course is being developed, focusing on 'Stepping Through University' and students' transition between levels of study. Students who participated in the focus group and survey suggested that the transition between levels of student was easier when there was a clear progression of modules from one year to the next, that is to say, *'modules in the next year build upon modules in the previous year, which is really helpful'*. One student stated,

*'As a second year, the **progression in exams and assignments helped to support development through the course** as we transitioned from open book in first year to closed book in second year'*.

This point was noted as particularly important for dissertation preparation.

3.3 PROGRESSION

In gathering evidence for this submission, it was a challenge to obtain feedback from graduates, therefore student responses on progression refer to current students' views on how the University is preparing them for progression into skilled employment, further student or other positive outcomes. A key theme in the student consultation was the Changemaker Hub and their Employability Plus Award, which students can work towards. The award was said to be *'a great attribute which is recognised by potential employers'*. A Drama student recalled how, through Changemaker, they had been able to work with a theatre company and spent six months building and touring a show, with three months of paid work and professional accreditation for their role. In addition, they were able to learn about regulations regarding equity of pay and how it works in industry, so that they would know what to look out for in a future contract. Other **students praised the Changemaker Hub for 'opening the doors to opportunities' for them** and *'hosting events like careers fairs that helped introduce [them] to people from industry and potential employers'*.

Many courses also hold specific events, feature modules or placement opportunities which are aimed at aiding progression and finding graduate roles. The Sports courses hold an annual 'Pitch and Present' event which invites partner organisations such as Northamptonshire Sport and Northampton Saints Rugby Club to present placement opportunities to students. The Games

Design programme held a competition-based event with Ubisoft for students to create a game based on a given brief, with a prize for the best design. Since 2019, the Faculty of Business and Law (FBL) has hosted an incredibly popular Dragons Den-style competition, FBL Challenge, for students to design and present new product line ideas for Northamptonshire fruit-processing business, Blue Skies. An MBA graduate credited the FBL challenge for helping to secure a job following graduation, saying,

'It was a game-changer for me, not only was the experience of taking part very valuable to develop my teamwork, writing and presentation skills, it has also paid dividends when it came to applying for jobs'.

3.4 EDUCATIONAL GAINS

Following initial conversations among the TEF Working Group, a paper on 'educational gain' was presented for discussion at UON's Student Experience Forum, which features representatives from departments across the University and NSU Sabbatical Officers. Colleagues likened the concept to previous ideas of 'value added' and **there was a consensus that educational gain is core to UON's mission and ethos**. A General Self-efficacy questionnaire (GSE), featured as part of the Employability Plus Award process, has been adopted as one potential measure of educational gain. GSE questionnaires seek to ascertain students' perceptions of their ability to complete a task. NSU's President's own MA thesis (studied at UON) explored the impact of self-efficacy in trainee teachers and identified a raft of literature which outlines the impact of self-efficacy on job performance, job satisfaction and well-being.

Whilst not a direct measure of self-efficacy, the Student Life Pulse asks students about the 'impact of University of students' personal confidence and self-esteem', with 59% of students noting a positive impact (2021/22; 52%, 2020/21; 60%, 2019/20). All of the students who participated in the focus groups and survey agreed that the University had helped them to make steps in understanding what they wanted to do and/or make steps towards achieving their aspirations post-graduation. With a strong profile of profession-based courses, **72% of UON's students were reported to know their career plan** (Student Life Pulse, 2021/22; 69%, 2020/21; 71%, 2019/20). For some, where unknown, there was a consensus that their degrees provided *'transferable skills and experiences which will be helpful for whatever [their] future career will be'*.

4 CLOSING STATEMENT

Overall, Northampton Students' Union is incredibly supportive of the work being done by the University and their direction of travel. UON is very receptive to student feedback and values students' perspectives on key institutional topics and, most importantly, their student experience. Throughout the development of the TEF submission and student submission, University colleagues have demonstrated transparency and a willingness to listen and action the feedback of students. In the face of adversities such as the pandemic and cyber-attack, UON retained student voice at the heart of every decision. NSU and UON mutually recognise there are some areas for improvement which are being addressed however, we strongly believe that under our new leadership, the University will continue to see positive growth and improvement for the benefits of its students and wider community.