

UNIVERSITY OF
HERTFORDSHIRE
**HIGHER EDUCATION
REVIEW 2015**

STUDENT
SUBMISSION

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Students' Union

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INTRODUCTION

The 2015 Student Submission for the University of Hertfordshire's Higher Education Review has provided Hertfordshire Students' Union a chance to reflect on the overall student experience here at the University.

During my time as Vice President Democracy and Services and then as President of the Students' Union, I have come to understand the hard work, dedication and continuous drive for improvement shared by University and Students' Union colleagues. Prior to that, as a Geography undergraduate at this University, I have benefitted first-hand from the same excellent student experience that so many of the students we spoke to in the compilation of this report have highlighted.

I believe this report is a true reflection of the views of students at the University of Hertfordshire. It is based on a variety of sources, including years' worth of NSS data, Student Barometers, SU Annual Surveys, Programme Committee minutes, focus groups and Advice and Support casework, and I can confidently say that a truly representative number of students have engaged with this process via the various feedback mechanisms used to compile this document.

I would like to thank all of the students who contributed their feedback to the research used to compile this submission, and I would also like to thank all at Hertfordshire Students' Union who assisted in the preparation of this report; especially my fellow Elected Officers and our Research and Representation Manager, Scott Grace. I would also like to thank Catherine Rendell and Dr Frank Haddleton for the support and encouragement offered to us at the Students' Union on behalf of the University.

I look forward to participating in the visit from the QAA review team, and am excited for the opportunity for student voices to be considered so strongly within the University of Hertfordshire's review.

Jack Amos

President and Lead Student Representative
Hertfordshire Students' Union
2015-2016



METHODOLOGY

A diverse range of students were consulted in the production of this submission. The report draws on the feedback provided by students through a variety sources (see below), which are analysed and drawn together thematically to give a comprehensive view of the student experience at the University of Hertfordshire.

Source	Population	Number of Respondents	Type of Data
National Student Survey (NSS) 2015	4461	3249	Quantitative and Qualitative
Post Graduate Taught Survey	Postgraduate Taught Students	1394	Quantitative and Qualitative
Hertfordshire SU Survey 2015	All students	2305	Quantitative and Qualitative
Destination of Leavers of Higher Education 2015	Alumni	2315	Quantitative
Student Ideas Submissions	All Students	523	Qualitative
Student Representative Experience Survey	628	133	Quantitative and Qualitative
Student Barometer 2014	First & Second Year Undergraduates; Postgraduates	4290	Quantitative and Qualitative
Student Focus Groups	All Students	73	Qualitative
Advice and Support Centre casework			
Programme Committee Minutes from 2012-2015	650 Student Reps and a total of 414 meetings	1477 Student Reps signed in at meetings	Qualitative

Comments extracted from all the qualitative feedback are used throughout this survey to reinforce the themes. Comments from the SU Survey 2015 and the Student Ideas Database are available on request from contact@hertfordshire.su.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section 1:	Student Representative Body	4
Section 2:	Previous Recommendations	10
Section 3:	Academic Standards	13
Section 4:	Learning Opportunities	18
Section 5:	Enhancement	28
Section 6:	Public Information	32
Section 7:	Thematic Review - Employability	34
Conclusion and Recommendations		37



SECTION 1: STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE BODY

This section covers what the developing relationship is like between the Union and University, as well as giving an insight into Hertfordshire Students' Union.

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1.1 THE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE UNIVERSITY

There are many partnerships that are found to be extremely positive between the University and the Students' Union. For instance, relationships with some units – such as the Learning and Teaching Innovation Centre and the majority of academic schools – are mutually beneficial. However, in some cases, the Students' Union has found that there are some challenging barriers in representing students effectively at all levels within the University. For instance, the relationships with the academic schools are very different, with some schools actively encouraging student representation, whilst others appear to consult students quite sporadically. Unsurprisingly at such a large and diverse institution, whilst the overall relationship could be described as varied, it is recognised that at a senior management level there is a commitment to continually improving the engagement with students.

The foundation of the Students' Union liaison with the University stems from the representation through five full-time Elected Officers. This is reinforced through some significant partnerships that have been developed by Students' Union staff. Underpinning the representational work of the Elected Officers is a network of Student Representatives that correspond directly with their programmes and often inform the Elected Officers of student opinion on a variety of academic and non-academic issues.

A positive and established practice that is in place is the mentor relationship between the Elected Officers and senior members of the Office of the Vice Chancellor (OVC). Through regular mentor meetings, the Union's Elected Officers have the opportunity to learn and develop from experienced professionals, while discussing student issues directly with members of the OVC team. This is a two-way process where its success relies on the commitment of both parties. Some participants commit to this relationship, truly ensuring that there is a mutually beneficial relationship.

Another layer of relationships that has been expressly developed over the past two years has been between the Students' Union and the University's ten academic schools. The Students' Union has committed to work with each School and has designated an Elected Officer to work closely with each School's senior management, School Student Representative Organisers (SSROs) and Student Representatives. This has led to some exemplary practices within the academic schools; however the engagement from academic colleagues varies, leading to more limited progression within these schools. A specific positive example has been

the active engagement from the School of Health and Social Work whereby there has been a continual dialogue with the Associate Dean Learning and Teaching and the Elected Officer.

1.2 UNIVERSITY/STUDENTS' UNION PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

There is a Partnership Agreement in place between the University and the Students' Union. The agreed understanding is that the Students' Union, in its working with the University has the following functions:

1. Promoting the interests and welfare of students at the University during their course of study and representing, supporting and advising students;
2. Being the recognised representative channel between students and the University and any other external bodies; and
3. Providing social, cultural, sporting and recreational activities (through the University's Athletic Union) and forums for discussions and debate for the personal development of its students.

Additionally, the University and the Students' Union have agreed to the following principles designed to underpin working relationships:

1. Strategic partnership
2. Student centred
3. Respect and understanding
4. Mutual trust, support and commitment
5. Independence

This partnership is managed most directly by the Vice Chancellor and Students' Union Group (VCSU) meeting, which is a 6-weekly meeting attended by the University's Deputy Vice Chancellor, Secretary and Registrar, Dean of Students and from the Students' Union, all five full-time Elected Officers and two Senior Managers.

1.3 STUDENT REPRESENTATION WITHIN UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The Students' Union full-time Elected Officers are members of the majority of key University Committees, including the University's Board of Governors, Academic Board, Student Educational Experience Committee (SEEC), Academic Standards and Audit Committee (ASAC), Campus Life Group, amongst other formal committees, working parties and groups. Student Representatives are members of Programme Committees and invited to take part in the School Academic Committees and Research Students are represented at the Ethics Committee and the Research Degrees Board.

It is worth noting that papers for some of the most senior University committees typically arrive only days before the committee meeting to which they apply, leaving very limited opportunity for elected representatives to prepare thoroughly, or take the opportunity to meet informally with University colleagues in advance of issues being discussed formally. Due to the complex nature of some of the matters discussed at University Committees, Elected Officers are disadvantaged by the timeliness of receipt of papers due to their relatively short term of office and relative inexperience serving on such committees. This negatively impacts the Elected Officers' ability to contribute to discussions and represent students' views effectively. Positively, this has been addressed at ASAC, where an Associate Director Academic Quality meets with Elected Officers and provides support before the meetings. This good practice has been extended to SEEC and is being explored for other formal committee meetings.

It is recognised that there are a variety of operational meetings taking place throughout the University with no student representation; however, the Chief Executive Group meeting (CEG) is a key regular meeting within the University where there is no direct student input. This has resulted in the University making decisions without student consultation. The Students' Union does not receive copies of CEG agendas or minutes. There is a verbal report on the matters presented at CEG by the Chair of VCSU, which helps communicate these issues to the SU Elected Officer team and Senior Management team. However, this discussion happens after the meetings, not prior to them, meaning there is not the opportunity for input from or consultation with students. As a result, the

Students' Union is often reactive to decisions rather than acting as a proactive partner in the decision making process. Examples where there has not been direct or prior student input into decisions made at CEG during the last six months include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Rent setting for Halls of Residence for 2015-16
- An amendment to the University calendar for 2015-16
- Presentation of Module Feedback Questionnaire data
- Presentation about changes on how the University communicates with prospective students following on from changes to guidance from the Competition and Markets Authority

1.4 SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE BODY

The Students' Union has five full-time Elected Officers and five part-time Elected Officers, forming the Executive Committee. Each Officer will have objectives that they were elected to achieve throughout their term in office alongside their portfolio/role and continual efforts to gather student opinion.

The full-time officer team is comprised of the following positions:

- **President** - responsible for coordinating the work of the elected officer team; acting as lead student representative and student governor.
- **Vice President Education and Welfare** – responsible for ensuring the students receive the best academic and pastoral support from the University.
- **Vice President Communications and Media** – responsible for ensuring the communications are relevant and accessible to our members as well as being Editor-in-Chief of the Student Media outlets.
- **Vice President Democracy and Services** – oversees the development of the Union's services as well as ensuring it remains democratic and policy is enacted.
- **Vice President Student Activities** – oversees the 160+ societies, volunteering, sport and development activities.

The Students' Union is responsible for training and supporting the SSROs and Student Reps, alongside supporting a number of student engagement initiatives including "Speak Week," "SU on the Road" and "Question of the Week." The information that is gathered through these types of activity is used to inform and assist the Elected Officer team so that they can represent the student viewpoint effectively to the University.

To ensure that the Union is accountable to its members, Student Ideas Forum (which is the name of the Student Council) provides students with the opportunity to hold Elected Officers to account and submit their own suggestions as to how the student experience can be improved.

The Union provides an extensive range of opportunities for students to undertake, whilst also supporting students in their own extracurricular and development activities such as societies, volunteering opportunities and student-run media outlets. Although the Students' Union does not directly run the Athletic Union, members of the SU Officer Team and Senior Management team sit on the board of the Athletic Union in order to ensure effective student representation in the University's sports offering.

The Union employs specially trained advisers to provide advice and support on a full range of pastoral topics including academic complaints to welfare. The service also offers a free legal advice service which runs weekly.

In addition to the above, the Union operates a lettings agency, a pub on campus, a 2,000 capacity nightclub and two convenience stores.

1.5 DEMOCRATIC APPROVAL

Due to the timings of the review visit, and the submission being produced in the summer months, the Students' Union has been unable to get democratic approval for this report. However, throughout the production of this report, all students have been able to contribute to its production through various engagement and research activities. Further to this, institution-wide data has been used extensively in the production of this report, which all students have the opportunity to contribute to. As with all Students' Union research reports, students can comment through the Union's website, and the report will be presented to the Student Ideas Forum in the autumn term. There will also be a session at the Student Representative Conference (Repstival) where Student Representatives will be able to discuss the submission at length.

1.6 UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS

The Student Submission has been prepared by the Students' Union team of Elected Officers with support from professional staff from Hertfordshire Students' Union. Students' views have been fully taken into account through the proactive use of a range of published data as well as the Students' Union's own all-student survey. The use of data such as NSS data, Student Barometer data and the Union's Student Survey provide a rich diversity of available information, effectively representing all demographics at the University. Progress has been made in terms of engaging with online learning students through the promotion of the Student Ideas system as a feedback mechanism and with the ongoing development of online Student Representation training, which is being produced in partnership with University colleagues and will be available from September 2016.

The 2,400 students that engaged with the Students' Union Survey are broadly in line with the University demographic data. There are only two areas where there are significant differences – engagement with postgraduate students which is 11% lower than the University demographic data suggests it should be, and students over the age of 30 which is 13% lower than the University student population. To address this, an Elected Officer has been aligned with the Doctoral College with the intention of developing the Students' Union relationship with these students in the future and ensure that the Students' Union is relevant to them.



1.7 COLLABORATIVE PROVISION

The University of Hertfordshire has extensive collaborative provision and the Students' Union has made efforts to engage with these students. An Elected Officer of the Students' Union is linked to collaborative partners with the intention of developing and embedding a relationship with these students. This partnership is achieved through regularly visiting the providers, where possible, for events such as local Freshers' fairs, induction talks and progression evenings. Tailored and targeted communications are regularly sent to the providers and directly to the students. Specific research activities have been hosted at the colleges to enable the Union to better understand the expectations of these students. This work is supported within the University by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (UK Education Partnerships).

Students studying at collaborative partners rate their experiences very highly and comparably with their peers studying at the University's main campuses. This is a strength of the University compared to many other institutions with extensive collaborative provision. The Union is continually building on the foundations it has laid down and actively works to extend this culture of working with collaborative providers internationally.



1.8 THE UNION'S RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS QAA INSTITUTIONAL REVIEWS

Since the previous QAA Review, the Union and the University have undergone substantial changes. As highlighted above, the Union has frequently been involved in discussions concerning major institutional changes and has actively shared student views on topics that affect the student experience.

In the Student Submission for the 2009 Institutional Audit, the Students' Union made the following recommendations:

Recommendation	Outcome
Continue working on teaching and assessment procedures, involving programme representatives where possible.	Work in this area is continuing. The Learning and Teaching Innovation Centre is committed to working with Schools to improve Learning and Teaching as well as Assessment and Feedback. NSS results for both these areas, whilst still being short of the sector mean, continue to show improvements.
Maintain and further enhance the learning resource facilities for example by providing more core textbooks and by making the libraries student friendly environments.	The Office of the Chief Information Officer have historically scored very well in terms of student satisfaction and has invested heavily in developing the Learning Resource Centres. The Students' Union is pleased that there are plans to re-offer student email addresses, however the Union has previously recommended, and continues to recommend, that physical helpdesks are re-introduced in order to ensure students have face to face support whilst using the LRCs.
Improve the representation and feedback systems by putting greater advertising on StudyNet portals.	A new Student Rep system was implemented in the 2010/2011 academic year. This is a partnership between the University and Students' Union. Student Rep details are now linked to a student's course page and enhanced resources for students and staff are available from hertfordshire.su. Numbers of Student Reps have increased from approximately 220 in 2009 to over 700 in 2014/15.
Improve the overall quality of the services it provides.	Currently, overall satisfaction for the University in the National Student Survey 2015 is 84%. This is a continuation of the upward trajectory of results and is the highest score for the University since the introduction of the NSS.

SECTION 2: PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

This section covers the outcomes of the previous QAA Review and outlines what actions have been subsequently taken.

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2.1 PREVIOUS RECOMMENDATIONS

In the previous QAA review of the University of Hertfordshire in 2009, the review team made four recommendations. Students' Union records show that these issues were discussed through the University committee structure and responded to accordingly. Academic Development Committee considered changes to awards and titles with SEEC and ASAC discussing changes to regulations with the whole process overseen by the Academic Board. The Union was actively involved in the University's preparations for HE Review and are confident that appropriate responses were actioned and outlined below:

The University had a follow-up from QAA in May 2012 where it was concluded that they have made good progress in addressing the recommendations from the 2009 Institutional Audit.

Recommendation	Outcome
Revise the process by which short courses that contribute to University awards are developed and approved, to include input external to the University, in order to ensure the appropriateness of level, content, learning outcomes and assessment.	From 2010, the University externally consult on credit-rated short courses and the assessment regulations no longer differentiate between modules and short courses.
Revise the generic grading criteria so that the grades align with those in the University Grading and Marking scale, to further develop these grading criteria to differentiate between all levels and to ensure their consistent use and communication to students.	The generic grading criteria was aligned with the University's grading criteria and guidance was produced by the Learning and Teaching Innovation Centre for the development of subject specific grading criteria. The UPRs now require students to be able to easily access the grading criteria for all forms of assessment.
Develop further, implement and publish protocols for ensuring that the academic standards of programmes delivered and assessed in languages other than English are equivalent to those delivered and assessed in English; in particular, and in the light of its risk-based approach to the oversight of modules delivered by partner institutions, to introduce and publish protocols for the moderation by University staff of modules judged to be of medium or high risk.	The University have put in place a number of procedures to ensure academic standards of programmes delivered in a language other than English and has wound down the provision with the last programme delivered in this way being withdrawn by July 2016.
Revise plans for making awards based on credit-bearing short courses and/or accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) so that appropriate attention is paid to external reference points, including subject benchmark statements, in determining the name of such awards, and, in doing so to review APEL protocols in support of the process.	The University Flexible Credit Framework now describes the revised process for the approval of APEL and also the process for the approval of awards with significant proportions of APEL. The University has also implemented a maximum percentage of 75% APEL credits for an award.



2.2 STUDENTS IMPLEMENTING CHANGES

The recommendations made in the previous review were technical and student consultation on these changes was through agreed channels via the University's committee structure.

2.3 SHARING GOOD PRACTICE

In line with the developing relationship between the institution and the Union, generally speaking, good practice is shared. University committees undertake away days which consist of workshops and sessions designed to share practice across the whole institution. Annual School Reports also require schools to draw out good practice which is then shared at SEEC and ASAC. Forums for Associate Deans of School Learning and Teaching and Academic Quality are held to facilitate the culture of sharing and the Centre for Academic Quality Assurance organise similar sessions for programme tutor. A further example of this is the Learning and Teaching Conference which is open to all staff at the university as well as local and international partners. Hertfordshire Students' Union has active involvement in University committee meetings.

The Union actively encourages the sharing of good practice between schools and departments as well as other institutions. For example, in the Union's annual Student Experience Report, student feedback is compared on a school by school basis – an also on a national level where appropriate – on a variety of issues, such as Communication, Organisation and Management, Assessment and Feedback and Teaching and Learning. Where applicable, feedback scores/results that are above the national averages are highlighted and sharing between schools is actively encouraged. The Students' Union also shares good practice from other institutions. For instance, before the introduction of the computerised timetabling system at the University, the Students' Union highlighted the introduction of a similar system at Anglia Ruskin University - a subsequent visit was scheduled. The Union also championed good practice in advance of the development of the Hutton Hub (a new building development on the College Lane campus, bringing together all student facing administrative services, include the Students' Union), arranging a visit with University colleagues to the University of Exeter to learn from their experiences in developing a similar space on their campus. A series of visits were also undertaken by the Students' Union to other institutions to look at best practice in the development of Halls of Residence prior to the development of new Halls at the University of Hertfordshire.

SECTION 3: ACADEMIC STANDARDS

This section covers the academic experience of students at the University of Hertfordshire, covering aspects such as assessment and feedback, curriculum design and content.

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3.1 ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

Responses about the perceived quality of assessment and feedback - gathered through a range of surveys - indicate a mixed picture. For example, results from the Postgraduate Taught Student Experience Survey (PTES) indicate that postgraduate taught students are generally more satisfied than both their peers at other institutions and their undergraduate counterparts. Undergraduates, whilst seeing further improvement in the 2015 NSS are still below the sector as demonstrated in Figure 1. Analysis of the text comments fed back from students on this topic indicates that the key issues are:

- Assessment clustering
- Promptness of feedback
- Quality and consistency of feedback
- Impact of group work

These ongoing issues have been presented to the University through the Students' Union's previous two annual Student Experience Reports and through a working group to review assessment and feedback that has been established over the past academic year. This working group was established at a meeting of SEEC in March 2015. It will be chaired by the Director of Learning and Teaching and will comprise of representatives of staff and students from every school as well as an Elected Officer of the Students' Union and other relevant staff. The Students' Union will continue to work with University colleagues to ensure student feedback is considered appropriate throughout the review and beyond.

UH Assessment and Feedback NSS Scores 2007 - 2015

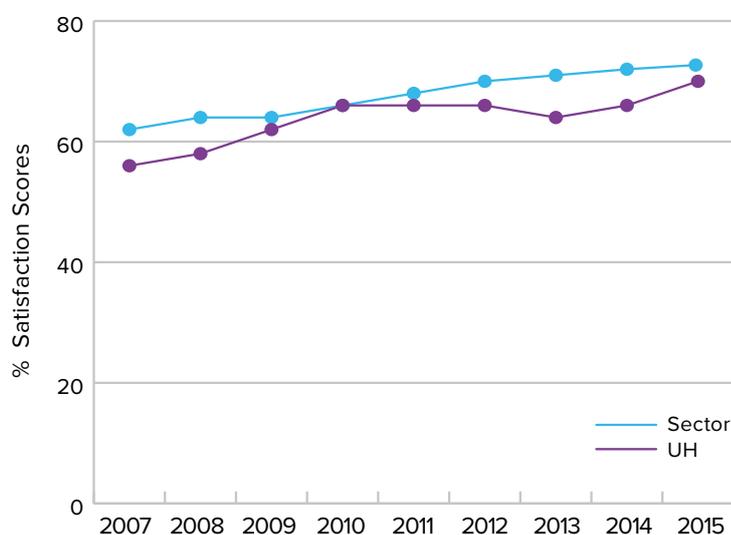


Figure 1 - UH and Sector NSS Assessment and Feedback mean scores 2007 - 2015

3.1.1 ASSESSMENT CLUSTERING

Student comments within both the NSS and the SU Annual Survey indicate there is an issue with assessment clustering (i.e., a large number of assignments due or exams scheduled within a very short space of time) at the University. Comments indicate that on some programmes, there are periods with little or no summative assessment followed by a short period with a high number of assessments due. This is reinforced by Question 6 in the NSS ('Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair') where UH scored 72%, which is 6% lower than the sector mean at 78%. In the SU survey, where the same question was asked to level 4, 5 and 7 students, the results of 76%, whilst being an improvement on the NSS results, are still below the sector mean by 2%. An audit of Programme Committee meetings dating back to 2012-13 also clearly indicates that assessment clustering is persistently prevalent across the institution, being raised 69 times in 414 meetings.

Final year assignments very close and not always enough time to receive feedback for use in next assignment. Assignment hand-in date during placement caused extra stress.

NSS 2015, Education student

The exam and coursework due dates clashed and very too close making which caused there to be very limited time to revise as well as complete coursework. The structure this year was poorly managed and I feel as if coursework due dates and exam dates were not considered appropriately.

NSS 2015, Accounting and Finance student

Assignments need to be spread and spaced over the term/school year in a much more thought out way not just clumped together!

SU Survey 2015, 2nd year student, Health and Social Work

Reducing the number of assessments clustered together will benefit students as they will have the benefit of receiving feedback on earlier assignments prior to embarking on subsequent pieces of work. There is also the potential that better spacing of assessments will reduce the pressure on academic members of staff who are tasked with adhering to a four-week marking period.

In the 2014 Student Experience Report, it was recommended that the impact of assessment clustering on students' learning outcomes should be reviewed and reduced as much as practically possible. In response to this, the University have established a working group to review Assessment and Feedback across the whole institution, which will take into account assessment clustering. The 2014/15 ASAC Audit of the Four-Week Turn Around required the production of an Assessment Landscape for all programmes. This proved to be a useful exercise for eight schools which has enabled them to make improvements to the distribution of assessment.

This learning landscape exercise is not a one off and programmes are now required to put in place learning landscapes when they validate new programmes or periodically review existing programmes.

The Students' Union had previously recommended in the 2014 Student Experience Report that adherence to the four-week return of work should be enforced rigorously and as a priority across the institution. This was examined through the University's working group review of assessment and feedback established in March 2015, and an ASAC audit of compliance with this turnaround demonstrates that this is now largely common place across the University and efforts are demonstrating clear results. Comments indicate that students value feedback to enable them to develop their thinking for future assignments. The University UPR AS12 Section 5.5 states: *'Students' coursework will be returned together with feedback no later than four (4) calendar weeks after the submission deadline.'*

Feedback on my assignments has rarely been returned within the 4 - week period.

SU Survey 2015, 1st year student, Humanities

3.1.2 PROMPTNESS OF FEEDBACK

The University's score on Question 7 ('Feedback on my work has been prompt') of the NSS show an improvement of 6%, taking this score to within 2% of the sector mean. This has been an ongoing issue which was highlighted following on from the 2012 Student Barometer survey, where the University scored 77% against a competitor score of 81.3%. The long term nature of this issue is demonstrated in Figure 2, which shows that since 2010, the gap between the University of Hertfordshire and the sector was increasing. However, there has been significant improvement in 2015, which is welcome and to be commended.

Marking for some modules has surpassed the 4-week limit with no communication as to why or any apology. It's not okay for us to submit our work late but it's apparently fine if they mark it after their given 4 week period.

NSS 2015, Automotive Engineering student

They aim to give feedback on assignments within 4 weeks but when you have another assignment due that continues from the first and you've been waiting 6/7 weeks for feedback that is barely acceptable, especially when the feedback you do finally get is of poor quality and didn't provide any idea of room for improvement.

NSS 2015, Computer Science student

UH NSS Q7 scores versus sector mean 2007-2015

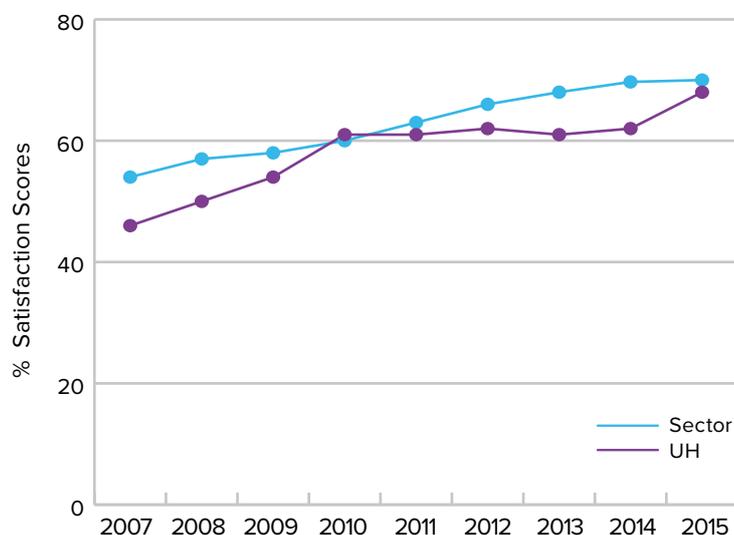


Figure 2 - UH and Sector NSS Q7 2007-2015

The Students' Union continues to recommend that this adherence is continually monitored.

The Students' Union has also previously recommended that the University consider reducing the time permitted to return assessed work to 15 working days, as is the case in some other comparable institutions. The Students' Union continues to recommend this, but it is appreciated that substantial further discussion will need to take place in advance of this being considered.

3.1.3 QUALITY AND CONSISTENCY OF FEEDBACK

Students indicate across a range of feedback mechanisms including the NSS, Student Barometer, SU Survey and Programme Committees that they value tutor feedback to aid in their learning and development. Since 2012, quality and consistency of feedback has been raised 78 times at programme committee meetings. They also highlight that there is ongoing inconsistency in both marking and feedback across marking teams and programmes. Good quality feedback is a fundamental tool to enable students to develop their skills and should challenge appropriately.

Assessments are not always detailed enough and I feel like I don't have a clear enough view on what is asked of me, especially on my final projects.

SU Survey 2015, 2nd year student, Humanities

Lecturers are very ambiguous when it comes down to feedback and tutorials. Lecturers not giving you any beneficial feedback during tutorials leading to low marks which could be easily avoidable if they would simply tell you that you should start your work over.

NSS 2015, Music Composition & Technology student

Doing a Law degree, I believe there was never enough help from the staff. When seeking help from tutors, there was never any provided as it was said to be giving an "unfair advantage". Paying such large sums the least that could be provided is some help in times of need, which can be done without giving the answers. Feedback on coursework would be low, merely side marks stating "okay" but not constructive criticism to demonstrate a loss of 50 marks.

NSS 2015, Law student

The Students' Union has previously recommended, and continues to recommend, that the University carry out an audit of feedback practice within each school against the NUS Ten Principles of Good Feedback Practice. These points were accepted as good practice in principle by the University and Associate Deans Learning and Teaching agreed to oversee benchmarking activities in their schools in February 2014, so the Union hopes that this will be considered within any assessment and feedback review. It is noted that the SED references that these feedback points have been promoted, but the Union recommends they be pursued more rigorously by the University to ensure consistent application. A gap analysis has previously been recommended in order to develop a central understanding of where

various schools are in terms of their implementation of the ten principles of good feedback practice.

3.1.4 IMPACT OF GROUP WORK

Some students highlight the impact of group work and a perceived over-reliance by certain schools on it as an assessment method. This is particularly prominent within the Business School, largely due to the numbers of students. Group work can be extremely frustrating for all students. The reasons for this frustration are varied but include the allocation of groups with varying degrees of commitment to their studies, language barriers and cultural differences, all of which can impact group dynamics and communication.

Many students feel aggrieved about the use of group work when this is used as part of their assessment, especially when all members of the group are perceived to receive the same marks, although different team members may actually contribute at varying levels. Students are especially concerned about the use of group work in the final year of undergraduate studies as they wish to achieve their maximum potential but often feel let down by the impact group work may have on their final marks.

Improving scores for Assessment and Feedback in both the NSS, as illustrated in Figure 1, and PTES is positive and reflects that a good deal of effort from all levels within the University has been concentrated on this area. However there is still a considerable amount of work that needs to be done to further improve satisfaction levels in this area. Where there has been areas significant improvement, such as in Creative Arts, good practice should be shared and explored across the institution.

3.2 EXTERNAL EXAMINER REPORTS

Student Representatives are able to access external examiner reports at Programme Committees through the Annual Monitoring and Evaluation process.

Students can access their external examiner reports through StudyNet on a 'by request' basis. There is information on the Student Support pages of StudyNet on the use of external examiner reports and how to request them, from the Centre for Academic Quality Assurance. In addition to this, information is also available on the 'Representation' pages of the Students' Union website.

The Students' Union's Advice and Support Centre has supported students with academic complaints using external examiner reports in the past.

3.3 GRADING CRITERIA

The University stipulates in UPR AS12 5.2.1 the minimum requirement for the development and publication of its grading criteria:

- Each programme must publish Grading Criteria in the programme handbook.
- The Grading Criteria must relate to the University Grade Descriptors
- Grade Criteria should be available for all assessments on a programme.
- Feedback on assessments must be consistent with the University Grade Descriptors

Additional guidance is available from the Learning and Teaching Innovation Centre.

Other than isolated issues, that are promptly resolved, there is no evidence that students are dissatisfied in the implementation of the grading criteria. This is positive and reflected in Q6 of the NSS, which shows the University to be 1% above the sector.

3.4 NEW PROGRAMME DESIGN

The development of new programmes is a complicated process which features student representation at a variety of points. It is usual practice for a student from a similar programme to the one being developed to be a member of a new programme panel. There is a section of the validation event is dedicated to a meeting with students. Where it is not possible to have representation from current students, alumni are consulted. The Union is happy to support any student involved in this process on a one to one basis and students are mentored by the relevant Associate Director Academic Quality.

In addition to students being members of the validation process, the development documents direct development teams to consider student support processes and ensure that the programme has been benchmarked against the University's Graduate Attributes.

During Periodic Review, there is a requirement for teams to consult with students through a range of methods including focus groups about their

programme before any improvements can be made.

Academic quality processes can be complex for students involved. Members of the Centre for Academic Quality Assurance have worked with members of the Students' Union to improve the support and guidance provided to students, including the redrafting of some of the documentation that is provided to student panel members.

The Union has a well-established relationship with the Centre for Academic Quality Assurance. A particular highlight has been that the CAQA have invited members of the Union to observe the process to demonstrate the effectiveness of student involvement.

3.5 PLAGIARISM

The University's rules and regulations about plagiarism are clearly demonstrated in its UPRs. Specific information should also be available in programme handbooks which are available from course pages on StudyNet. There is also additional support and guidance available on the support pages of StudyNet and from the Office of the Dean of Students'.

The University also makes available access to Turnitin as a learning tool. Support and guidance is available on StudyNet to assist students to use Turnitin and to understand its report to develop their work. There are examples of students being confused by the rules around referencing due to the use of different referencing methods within different schools. This is particularly confusing for students studying Joint Honours programmes or where there are modules hosted by a different school.

The Union has produced some simple to understand support and guidance for how to avoid plagiarising as well as guidance on how to appeal a decision that has been made.

SECTION 4: LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

This section covers the learning experience here at the University of Hertfordshire and how different areas impact the student experience.

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4.1 TEACHING STANDARDS WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY

The teaching standards at the University are generally regarded as being very good and are continually developing through the work of the Learning and Teaching Innovation Centre. Events such as the Learning and Teaching Conference enable colleagues from across the institution and the wider academic community such as our local

and international partners to share practice and explore innovative resources. An Elected Officer from the Students' Union gave a session at the 2015 conference.

National results indicate that students are reasonably satisfied at all levels. The 2015 NSS results indicate that the University has progressed in this area is now only 1% off the sector mean.

Table 1 - showing results of the teaching and learning questions of each survey

Statement	NSS 2015 Sector in (%)	SU Survey 2015	PTES 2014 Sector in (%)
Staff are good at explaining things	90% (90%)	79%	86% (87%)
Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching	88% (88%)	n/a	89% (90%)
The course is intellectually stimulating	85% (86%)	82%	84% (86%)
The course has enhanced my academic ability	n/a	n/a	85% (86%)
The learning materials provided on my course are useful	n/a	n/a	81% (82%)
There is sufficient contact time (face to face and/or virtual/online) between staff and students to support effective learning	n/a	n/a	65% (67%)
I am happy with the support for my learning	n/a	n/a	73% (75%)

There are a high number of comments in various surveys which indicate that there are a considerable number of exceptional staff here at the University who should all be commended for their open, inclusive and engaging teaching practices. Their efforts directly impact the student experience, providing students with a positive experience. Teaching staff are without question the staff members students engage with on the most consistent level, so positive or negative experiences with teaching staff are instrumental in shaping students' views of their experiences at the

University. Whilst there are exceptional members of staff, it must also be noted that where there is variance in the quality of teaching, this will also have a direct impact on the student experience.

Negative comments

The lecturers' enthusiasm outweighs their ability to actually teach the things they care about. The communication has been abysmal and very few of the lecturers seem to have a solid grasp on reading and writing the English language, basic language and grammar mistakes undermined my faith in the lecturers from day one. I really cannot stress how frustrating this was, the formatting and grammar in communication and documents was just abysmal, frequently to the point where it actually obscured what the lecturer was trying to say. Frequently I found that I already knew the information presented in the lectures from tutorials that I had watched online.

NSS 2015, Film and Television student

There is usually not enough direct teaching involved. It can seem boring and repetitive to have slides presented to students, rather than writing on a whiteboard and going through learning objectives. Some students do not bother trying to complete pre-tutorial work and delay the learning process for students who come well prepared.

NSS 2015, Accounting and Finance student

The business professional lectures rarely taught us anything, Marketing tutorials did not help to reiterate the info from lectures

SU Survey 2015, 1st year student, Hertfordshire Business School

Positive Comments

Some of my teachers have been superb going the extra mile. They teach with passion and such joy that it makes the lessons easier to understand.

SU Survey 2015, 2nd year student, Hertfordshire Business School

I think the lecturers are very engaged in their professions and definitely make the course very interesting. They are very hard on us to prepare us for the industry, which I appreciate. Lecturers try their best to keep up with the crazy fast moving industry standards by getting the newest software and actually teaching it...Lecturers are very encouraging and understanding.

NSS 2015, Animation student

The paramedic lectures have been some of the most enthusiastic and stimulating of the entire course, mostly because of lecturers who hail from a paramedic backgrounds who have led are educated and given us insight into the experiences that relate directly to our course.

Whilst others lectures were also stimulating, the drive behind the lecturers was most felt by those in the practical sessions and it clearly showed they were doing their best to make us understand and improve as a cohort.

NSS 2015, Paramedic student

In the 2013 Student Experience Report, the Students' Union raised the ability to teach effectively in English as a result of increasing student feedback on this issue. The Union recommended that the ability to teach in English be assessed at interview for new members of staff, and monitored through the peer review system. The University's Director of HR confirmed that English language skills are tested at interview for new staff and indicated that there would be an audit on local inductions by Easter 2015; however the Students' Union is still unsure whether English is part of the peer review process.

4.2 FEEDBACK ON LECTURES

There are many ways for students to feedback on their lectures. Firstly, there is the Student Rep system; Student Reps are trained to raise issues using appropriate channels. This can be informally, directly with the lecturer or more formally through the Programme Committee. Alternatively, individual students have the opportunity to feedback through the Module Feedback Questionnaire (MFQs), which allows students to feedback on module issues and about individual lecturers. The top three issues from an audit of the Programme Committees 2012-15 are:

- Course and module organisation, not including timetable issues
- Module/course content and additional support
- Course level communications about changes and general information

Some schools have created additional ways for students to feedback based at a school level. Some schools operate a school student forum for open dialogue. The School of Computer Science have been highly commended by the HEA for their forum.

4.3 LEARNING RESOURCES

The University of Hertfordshire has consistently had very good scores for its learning resources, remaining well above the sector average as evidenced by the National Student Survey. It is also reassuring that these scores are consistent across the institution. In NSS 2015, the University's score was 89% which is 3% above the sector mean..

The University has a range of exceptional resources and facilities available to students in addition to the Learning Resources Centres. For example it has:

- A Law Court to give law students opportunities to simulate court room scenarios within a realistic setting.
- A GIS Lab providing state of the art software to Geography and Environmental Sciences students.
- Simulators and a Formula Student Lab for Engineering students.

The equipment and resources provided by the university are excellent; the campus is modern and clean.

NSS 2015, Animation student

Getting to use a Quadcopter as part of the GIS module was one of the more interesting experiences on the course.

NSS 2015, Geography student

Formula student was a selling factor as to why I came to this university, have been part of it for 3 years and have learned many things which have complimented my academic studies and vice versa.

NSS 2015, Automotive Engineering student

4.3.1 LEARNING RESOURCE CENTRES

The University has two, well-resourced Learning Resource Centres (LRCs), both of which are open 24 hours a day. These contain physical libraries and well-stocked electronic library resources. Whilst these are a good resource, there are individual persistent issues that remain unresolved. For example Event Management books are located on a different campus to the campus of delivery. This was mentioned in both the NSS 2013 and 14 comments and directly to the Students' Union through the Student Rep system. This small anomaly directly impacts and inconveniences a whole programme of students. In addition to the LRCs, there are a range of innovative learning spaces and study areas to

accommodate the diverse learning styles of the student population.

The University regularly invests in its IT resource and has recently procured in a number of high specification computers to support advanced software which are accessible 24 hours a day.

The University has taken positive steps to reduce noise levels within the LRCs. This had previously been a long standing issue; however, improvements have been made in recent years. Processes to access the silent study areas require students who wish to use these facilities to be proactive and activate their ID card for access and new furniture designed to create a variety of spaces whilst breaking up the noise have also been implemented. Combined with the development of the mezzanine area within the de Havilland Atrium and the New Chapman Lounge, the University offers a diverse range of study spaces accessible to all.

The library (LRC) and online library is an exceptional help and has any book, article or journal you need ... for free! I have never been without sufficient literature or without a PC in the LRC on either campus.

NSS 2015, Sports Studies student

The LRC opening times (24/7) is brilliant as we can use the facility around our schedule/needs. Also, we can access the information we need online without the need to go to the LRC, such as the use of e-journals.

NSS 2015, Accounting and Finance student

I really appreciate the LRC and its Silent Study areas, especially when preparing to exams.

SU Survey 2015, 1st year student, Computer Science

4.3.2 STUDYNET

The University has a locally developed virtual learning environment called StudyNet. This has recently been reviewed and updated and is subject to a further enhancement in the future through an ongoing programme of development. Elected Officers of the Students' Union have been active members of the project group responsible for overseeing the development of StudyNet since it was formed in 2013.

Each programme uses their StudyNet site in a different way. For example, the School of Law uses it to host its knowledge-based lectures as well as access to resources and discussions whereas some departments within the School of Life and Medical Sciences use it primarily for access to news and resources.

StudyNet contains course specific information and access to all relevant documentation for students' courses. Further to this, it also contains generic school and University-wide information. Through StudyNet, students can also access the virtual library resources and key information on university services.

There is some feedback that indicated that the quality of information available on StudyNet is variable according to programme of study:

StudyNet is sometimes not utilised as efficiently as possible especially as I am a Joint Honours student.

SU Survey 2015, 2nd year student, Joint Honours

Module information on the university's StudyNet is hugely variable both in terms of quality and structure. On the latter, there are some module leaders (not many, fortunately) who make a complete mess of it all: information is just dumped in the root folder, despite some pre-existing weekly structured folder structure. Or worse, is hidden in unrelated subsequent sub-sub-sub-... subfolders and sometimes having a broken link instead of the actual resource.

NSS 2015, Nursing student

However, overall, students are very appreciate of the time that staff take to update StudyNet pages and the content and capabilities of the StudyNet portal.

StudyNet is good for receiving information and staff often upload resources with adequate time prior to the lecture.

NSS 2015, Radiography student

StudyNet is a mostly clear and straightforward access to academic information. It also provides links to helpful resources and has been vastly improved in the past 2 years.

NSS 2015, Accounting and Finance student

Moreover, I found Studynet as very helpful platform to communicate with Tutors and other students, on daily basis. When a student uses Studynet more than Facebook it means, that is has been perfectly designed, is engaging and students want to learn.

SU Survey 2015, 1st year student, Computer Science

4.4 THE UNIVERSITY ESTATE

The University has two campuses, both located in the town of Hatfield. The College Lane Campus is the original campus dating back to the Technical College. The de Havilland Campus was built in 2003 on the site of a former British Aerospace factory.

The University has an ongoing programme of development with a substantial level of investment in facilities, particularly on the College Lane campus. The University has either started or completed the following, which are all considered to be excellent additions to the campus including:

- The Hutton Hub – located on College Lane and featuring key student services and the Students' Union in a centralised location
- New student accommodation on the College Lane campus
- A new science building featuring state of the art labs and specialist teaching spaces

In addition to the above, the University has plans for the following over the next few years:

- A substantial refurbishment of the Main Building to co-locate the School of Engineering and Technology and further enhance engineering workshops and laboratory space. This includes the Exemplar Classroom project, which invites student input on the design of new teaching spaces to inform designs of learning and teaching spaces.
- A general teaching building to create modern learning spaces

Continued investment is excellent for students who are seeing their campus transformed, however, such extensive building programmes inevitably causes disruption with routes being blocked off and noise. Positively, however, efforts are made to minimise the impact on students during construction, for example by scheduling noisy works to avoid examination periods.

Resources and facilities provided are very good. Lecture halls are comfortable.

NSS 2015, Psychology student

Additionally, the university facilities are improving so much.

NSS 2015, Tourism and Events student

Whilst the redevelopment of the College Lane halls of residence is welcomed, the Students' Union is concerned that rent charges to students are unacceptably high. Rents on campus have increased by 16.3 % per week since 2012-13 and the length of contracts have also increased to a standard 42 weeks in most instances. This results in student maintenance grants and loans not covering accommodation costs for the year and students paying rent on a property which they are not using for the full length of their contact.

The Students' Union has concerns that the de Havilland Campus may get left behind and further investment in the campus learning environment, including social learning spaces and social facilities are needed in due course. In addition to this, due to the huge diverse student population, the Students' Union believes that further investment is needed to provide adequate space for students and staff to meet their faith needs. Whilst the University has allocated some space for quiet reflection on the campus, there is a need to provide a proper multi-faith space on the de Havilland campus.

4.5 STUDENT REPRESENTATION

Student representation is vital to the ongoing development of the University and the Students' Union. The system is a fundamental process for students to be partners in their education and allows the institution to evolve and be shaped by students feeding back their changing needs.

4.5.1 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF STUDENT REPRESENTATION

The University's Student Representative system is jointly managed by the University and the Students' Union. The day to day operations of the Student Representation system, including training, development and overall communications, is managed by the Students' Union. The Union works collaboratively with academic and administrative staff to ensure that Student Representatives are elected, trained and supported so that they can work closely with the University to provide feedback on academic issues and other matters. The Student Representation programme is administered through the Student Representation Engagement Group, which is chaired by the Dean of Students and features representatives from both the Students' Union and the University. There is a deep commitment from all parties within this group to the continued development of student representation at the University.

The SU is optimistic about the principles which underlie the student representation system. As with any wide-ranging programme, there are some differences between Schools and departments as to how the system operates in practice. Although there is a University-wide principle that Student Representatives are elected, anecdotally it has been highlighted that in one or two schools, academic staff demonstrate a preference for selecting Student Reps through an application process rather than students electing their representatives. This has been highlighted to University senior staff and there has been agreement to address issues such as these locally when they occur. Additionally, anecdotally, it has been highlighted that in other departments, some staff may communicate predominantly with their School Student Representative Organisers (SSROs) rather than with the broader cohort of Student Reps. SSROs are selected by staff in conjunction with the Students' Union, and are paid a bursary to support and organise Student Reps. SSROs were not originally conceived to be a formal part of the academic representation structure. However, in some instances they are used as such, including being members of School Academic Committees in place of Student Representatives. Again, however, there has been a commitment from University senior staff to address these issues as they occur.

In May 2015, following a number of requests, Hertfordshire Students' Union were provided with the Programme Committee minutes for the previous three academic years. Analysis of these minutes highlights that a number of issues have been consistently raised at a Programme Committee

level over the years. The main themes that have been raised regularly over the previous three years include:

- **Timetable**

- › Students' timetables were a common theme in the Programme Committee minutes following on from a challenging introduction in the 2013-2014 academic year. However, new measures were subsequently put in place, and the number of times the timetable was raised in Programme Committee minutes dropped the following year, highlighting that student feedback on this issue had been taken on board.

- **Course and module organisation**

- › This includes issues such as: timings of lectures, interdepartmental communication, information about exam timetables being released early enough, the organisation of placements and the pastoral care students receive whilst on placements

- **Module/course content and additional support**

- › This includes issues such as: lack of varying lecture styles, varying levels of guidance to students with final year projects, varying information given marking criteria when administering assignments and varying degrees of support from tutors/requests for personal tutors

- **Course level communications about changes and general information**

- › This includes: students wanting to be informed about staff/tutor changes, students not being informed of session cancellations or last minute cancellations, students not receiving clarification on how degree classifications are worked out and module information being difficult to access on StudyNet.

The timetable was also raised a considerable number of times more recently, however the vast number of these were following the introduction of the centralised timetabling system. It should be noted that efforts are continually being put into improving the central timetable and these complaints have reduced substantially over the last two years, resulting in a significant improvement in the NSS scores for organisation and management in 2015.

Given the persistence of the above three issues as evidenced by Programme Committee minutes over the last three years, it is possible that some programmes are not responding effectively enough to address students' concerns. However, it is clear

that a great deal of good work does occur through Programme Committees.

4.6 THE STUDENT VOICE WITHIN QUALITY ASSURANCE

As covered in previous sections, students form a key part of quality assurance processes at a range of levels within the University. Student Representatives represent students at course level through Programme Committees and other school meetings. In their capacity as Student Representatives, they form a part of the Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Review process and are asked to respond to other data sources. Additionally, as referenced in Section 3.4, students are also involved and represented through the Programme Validation and Review process. At the University-level, students are represented via the Students' Union through attendance at nearly all University level committees and most standing and working groups.

4.7 RESPONSIVENESS TO STUDENT FEEDBACK

The University does listen to students' views when they are fed back, however action is not always taken promptly as students may consider ideal. This is much easier for the Students' Union to track at an institutional level as the Students' Union are usually involved in the decision making process. At a course level, it had previously not been possible to track as the Students' Union did not have access to Programme Committee minutes until May 2015. However, an analysis of the Programme Committee minutes over the last three years shows that students are engaged with the development of their courses and are generally willing to put forward the views of their peers. Some examples of where student feedback has been taken on board at an institutional level include:

- **Multi-faith Space on the de Havilland Campus**

- Students regularly raised the lack of faith space on the de Havilland Campus through the Student Ideas system. This prompted the Students' Union to undertake a research project where the overwhelming majority of respondents supported the idea of multi-faith provision on both campuses. The Students' Union lobbied the University who agreed to identify some interim spaces and eventually decided on the Weston Auditorium Green Room. Whilst the space is not an ideal long-term solution it is a welcome addition to the faith provision at the University

until a long-term solution is found.

- **Centralised Timetable Project** – Following persistently below-sector scores in the NSS for Organisation and Management in relation to timetabling, the University implemented a project to introduce a centralised timetabling system, available before the start of Semester A for the full academic year. Whilst the implementation caused considerable disruption during the 2013/14 academic year, the University took steps to rectify this during the 2014/15 year. The then Pro-Vice Chancellor Student Experience who oversaw the introduction met with students affected through specific school meetings and on a University-wide scale at the Student Ideas Forum to hear the views of students affected by the change. The Students' Union is confident that the implementation of the centralised timetabling system will have long term benefits for the general student population providing the University continues to be proactive in its approach, listening to students' views, and continues to respond in a timely fashion.
- **Assessment and Feedback Review** – Following student feedback across a range of mechanisms including plateauing NSS scores, Student Ideas feedback and through the Students' Union's own survey, in March 2015, the University established a standing group reporting to SEEC to review Assessment and Feedback across the whole institution. Schools have been asked to benchmark their own school against the NUS Principles of Assessment and Feedback as well as a central review being conducted across the entire University. Unfortunately, there is currently no requirement for Schools to report the outcomes of their local benchmarking exercise. The established working group comprises of representatives from across every school including students.

The University have implemented a number of improvements to the Module Feedback system, reverting back to a paper-based system taken in class with an online version available for online programmes and where students are not on campus to be able to complete a paper form. Despite this positive change in the process which engages a high number of students, the process for feeding back changes that are made as a result of student comments is not yet fully formed and further developments are being considered to allow this to occur.

Each school is required to produce an action plan in response to the NSS. Students are a part of this process through their Programme Committee. This is then shared centrally through SEEC. The University also collates a record of changes that are implemented as a result of student feedback

which is then promoted to students via SSROs to further encourage feedback and to share changes. General improvements in NSS results in the School of Creative Arts are a reflection of their responsive to student feedback and the NSS.

4.8 COMPLAINTS AND APPEALS

Students are able to find information about making a complaint or submitting an appeal in a range of places, including in programme handbooks, StudyNet, askherts.ac.uk and through the Students' Union Advice and Support Centre. Further to this, staff will informally direct them to the information and guide them through it. Whilst all the information and relevant guides are available on the Help and Support pages of StudyNet, they are lengthy and can be complicated to understand. Additionally, complaints and appeals are covered in the Student Rep Training, where Reps are encouraged to direct students who wish to discuss or instigate a complaint or appeal to the Students' Union's Advice and Support Centre.

4.9 EMPLOYABILITY

The University of Hertfordshire aims to be internationally renowned as the UK's leading 'Business Facing' University and places a strong importance on the employment of its graduates. It has developed a set of graduate attributes which are embedded within its programmes, that are designed to ensure that our graduates are high quality and employable. According to the Destination of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) survey conducted annually, the University has a good, and improving, track record in this regard. This is extremely positive for students and should be further enhanced over the coming years through the implementation of the University's strategy. On some programmes, they offer additional professional skills sessions, for example Chartered Institute of Marketing diploma in the Business School.

The Students' Union Survey highlights that in general students feel equipped for employment when they leave university. The only school when where this is not as common place is the School of Creative Arts which is 76% against a University average of 81%.

The University has a well-placed Careers, Employability and Enterprise service which provides support and opportunities for students to develop and take advantage of opportunities. The University is committed within its new Strategic Plan to every

student being able to access a placement during their studies, which goes even further to enhance employability.

Through opportunities provided through the Students' Union, students are able to further develop transferable skills. Through being a society committee member, becoming an SSRO or any of the other many leadership opportunities available, students are able to develop a range of skills which will further aid employment.

4.10 UNDERREPRESENTED STUDENTS

The University of Hertfordshire has a rich and diverse student population. It is made up of various groups from students studying on campus and in colleges, full-time and part-time students; the traditional 18-21 year old undergraduate, home/ EU students and International students, to a growing population of mature students and many more different groups and sub-groups.

The University has a Student Wellbeing department within the Office of the Dean of Students, which has a dedicated team supporting the University's disabled students by providing specialist advice and support. The recently formed Working Group that is looking at Inclusive Teaching, which features student representation via the Students' Union is reviewing supported for disabled students to ensure it continues to meet students' needs.

To help international students feel welcome, the University puts in place an induction week prior to the main Freshers' orientation activities to ensure they settle and get their bearings. This includes airport collections, welcome events and a mini Freshers' Fair specifically targeted at international students. All international students are also able to access English language support classes as well as a number of other services provided by the dedicated International Support Office.

The Students' Union provides a number of services which are available to all students and are designed to create a community on campus. The Union offers a range of cultural societies which showcase

many of the cultures and nationalities on campus. It is commonplace for societies to work together on events to showcase diversity. The Union also facilitates 'Conversational English' sessions to further encourage home and international students to work together to develop employability skills and conversational English language skills. Since 2013, the Students' Union has also organised an event for all students that remain on campus or within Hatfield on Christmas Day as this can be a very isolating and lonely time.

The University of Hertfordshire has undertaken work over recent years to understand why black students in particular achieve less academically than their peers. Whilst there has been some progress, it is recognised that there is still a great deal to do. The University is to be congratulated for the work it has done so far but the Students' Union urges to the University to persist in its efforts to actively support black students and continue to monitor progress.

4.11 PLACEMENTS

The Students' Union has conducted focus groups among students on placement and included questions in the annual SU Survey asking about student experiences whilst they are on placement.

The research highlights that students who participate in a year-long work placement are satisfied with their experience and benefit immensely from the opportunities for learning and development that a vocational placement provides. However, they do report that there are some organisational issues within the University that can impact on their experience. Confusion over who to go to in order to organise a placement can cause delays and unnecessary stress. The placement portfolio that is required can also be a particular challenge for students within the workplace with concerns ranging from a lack of clarity over the expectations and sometimes a lack of support in the workplace to complete the task. The University has acknowledged these shortcomings in the system and has moved quickly to establish a working group in 2014, the Placement Policy Group which is reviewing and improving these shortcomings as a priority.

The issue regarding travel costs to placement still remains a huge problem for most students. For example, I live in London and just 10-45 minutes from over 6 hospitals, ... where our university students are sent to but I have to travel to areas outside of London where sometimes I pay transport costs of up to £20 a day. This clearly was not outlined to me and the other students when we registered for this course.

NSS 2015, Nursing student

There needs to be better communication between the students and the teachers to receive more support when the students have concerns on placement or in theory. The teachers need to make actions to change negative feedback from the students before each module is completed.

SU Survey 2015, 2nd year student,
Health and Social Work student

Placement organisation also impacts on students on Health and Social Work programmes. Some students report in the NSS through the open text comments that they received placement information close to the placement start date with one reporting it as late as two days before the placement was due to begin. This is in part a reflection of the National Health Service and the limited number of hospitals in the region.

Education students appear to be more satisfied with their placement provision and the organisation of it. The SU believes this to be because of the size of the school which lends itself to being more of a community and the number of schools means that placement providers are more abundant than their NHS equivalents, which means things can be organised more in advance.

4.12 STUDENT CHARTER

The Student Charter is a document outlining the commitments that are expected of students, the University and the Students' Union. This initiative has been in place for three academic years and it has been reviewed annually by a sub-group of SEEC which is comprised of University staff and the President-Elect of the Students' Union. The Student Charter feeds into the University strategy via the Student Educational Experience Strategy.



SECTION 5: ENHANCEMENT

This section covers the ways in which student opinion enhances and shapes the work of the University. It considers opportunities for the student voice to contribute to the University, all the way from the programme level to a centralised level, ways in which the University feeds back changes to students and it examines the University's commitment to continual improvement.

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5.1 THE STUDENT VOICE

Students have many opportunities to contribute to the enhancement of their experience. They can contribute to the development of their programme of study and wider school through the Student Rep system and the Module Feedback Questionnaires (MFQs). Final year students can feedback via the National Student Survey. These are then brought together through the AMER process. For non-academic issues, students can contribute through the Student Ideas Forum as well as through the Student Barometer. Non-academic Strategic Business Units can access a Student Advisory Board comprised of Student Representatives and Elected Officers of the Students' Union, however these have not been utilised at the time of publishing this report.

Through Programme Committees, students (via their Student Representatives) are invited to contribute to the development of their programme through the Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Reports and their associated action plans. For new programmes, the programme validation process involves students who have experience of similar programmes within the University and student feedback is sought to ensure that student views are considered in the development stage.

On a University-wide scale, Elected Officers from Hertfordshire Students' Union are members of a number of key committees, including the Board of Governors and the Student Education Experience Committee. On an ongoing basis, the Students' Union also facilitates a number of campaigns such as 'Speak Week' and 'Question of the Week,' both of which enable students to feedback on issues and share ideas and opportunities for development. This is in addition to the Students' Union's all-student survey which is designed to give a good understanding of everything affecting the student experience. Alongside these opportunities to gather student feedback, the Students' Union also hosts regular Student Ideas Forums which enable students to raise issues of concern to them.

The Students' Union compiles information from the above, together with analysis of other available data, into an annual Student Experience Report. They also use themes drawn from casework brought to the Students' Union's Advice and Support Centre to support this work. The Student Experience Report is submitted to the Vice Chancellor and Students' Union Group (VCSU) meeting for detailed discussion and then presented more widely at the Student Education Experience Committee and the Chief Executive's Group (although there is no student representation on this committee, the Students' Union is invited to present this report on an annual basis).

The recommendations/themes identified through the previous two Student Experience Reports have been consistent. However, there has been limited progress on a number of these, which the Union considers a missed opportunity to allow the student voice to shape the development of University practices.

On a number of occasions the University have not respond to matters raised by students via a variety of surveys in a timely fashion. Examples include:

- Assessment and Feedback – raised in NSS Reports in 2012 and 2013 and 2014 Student Experience Report. However in 2014/2015, the University agreed to establish a working group to review this and develop best practice as well as making assessment and feedback the focus of a SEEC away day and the Learning and Teaching Conference.
- Organisation and Management – raised in NSS Reports 2012 and 2013 and the 2014 Student Experience Report
- Student communications – raised in the 2013 and 2014 Student Experience Reports

Positively, there have been some instances of student recommendations being acted on:

- In 2015, the University committed to reintroducing at @herts.ac.uk email addresses for students (which were abolished in 2011/12)
- In 2014 and 2015, Information Hertfordshire increased the number of computers in silent study on de Havilland to 50% of seats in response to student feedback about noise levels and improved notices and directions for silent study in Learning Resource Centres (LRCs). The analysis of the NSS 2013 comments shows 117 positive comments about LRC facilities and services and 162 negative; of which 20 mention noise and overcrowding. By NSS 2014, there were 153 positive comments about LRC facilities and 38 negative, of which only 11 mention noise.

5.2 FEEDBACK ON CHANGES

The University communicates changes through a number of channels. At a programme level, changes are often fed back to Student Representatives, who are encouraged to inform their cohort to ensure that local changes are communicated effectively. Additionally, information is displayed on StudyNet or through face to face communications. Responses from surveys are communicated through the 'you said we did' survey on course pages on StudyNet. Where University-wide changes are made and require feeding back, messages are put out to students through a range of channels including through StudyNet, Student Representatives and the Students' Union.

Communications to current students are generally considered to be in need of development, with schools devising their own communications mechanisms. Evidence from the NSS open text comments and through an analysis of Programme Committee minutes where the issue has been raised 140 times between 2012-15, clearly demonstrates that students are dissatisfied with the way they are communicated with both at a course level and at a University level.

Communication! There are always issues with my placements; I am yet to have any consistency with my placements. We don't hear enough about changes to the course and I don't feel that the course leaders listen to our concerns at all.

NSS 2015, Paramedic student

I wrote to the Dean about a few things that I believed needed changing, was told they will be discussed and I asked to be informed of future developments but heard nothing back and saw no significant changes.

SU Survey 2015, 2nd year student, Law

Changing the module choices for third year so close to the time when we are meant to choose was very disappointing. We, as a student body, were also not listened to and disregarded when we complained.

SU Survey 2015, 2nd year student, Computer Science

An example of where communication has not been sufficient is in the School of Engineering and Technology and in the Business School, where in 2013/14 changes to the degree algorithm were not communicated to students effectively. This led to students returning from placements and sandwich years not being aware of significant changes to how their degrees were being classified. Following a series of complaints about this issue, there was an eventual change to the process for these students.

Another significant example where students were not informed effectively of changes relates to recent changes to graduation ceremonies. The implications of the change in the academic calendar from 2014-15 on Health and Social Work students was not clearly communicated to these students. As a result, many of these students were disappointed to learn that their graduation ceremonies will now take place in the Weston Auditorium on campus rather than the at the St Albans Abbey, as many of them expected, unless they are prepared to wait until the following year's ceremony. This impact was not sufficiently understood during the consultation period, meaning there was insufficient opportunity for students views to be represented on this specific issue.

Communications to students is an issue that the Students' Union has consistently raised and it has recommended significant improvements in student communications on a number of occasions through its Student Experience and NSS reports.

5.3 ETHOS OF CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

The Students' Union believes that there is an ethos of continual development throughout the University. Students are aware of and engage with this, however this varies considerably across schools and other SBUs. A good example of this is the School of Law, which implemented a significant change in its pedagogical approach in 2011-12 when it relocated from the St Albans Campus to the de Havilland Campus. This change led to the introduction of the provision of knowledge based on-line lectures and the development of skills lectures to help students apply their knowledge in practice. There were significant difficulties with the implementation in the first two years, but at every stage, the School engaged with students and improved on the delivery. This has been reflected in the continued improvement in the NSS results for this school in Teaching and Learning and a corresponding reduction in the number of negative comments.

At a University level, the introduction of the centralised timetabling software is another example of continual improvement. The University opted to implement this change following poor feedback from students and poor room utilisation data. There were very clear principles set out and the new system was implemented in 2013-14. Whilst there were significant difficulties in the first instance, improvements were made for Semester B of the same year and further improvements made for 2014-15. There is clearly a drive to continue to improve this for the year ahead.

Unfortunately there is sometimes a tendency to fix an immediate problem and then assume that this matter is closed without needing continuous follow through. An example of this is the registration process. In 2012, there were significant problems with the organisation of student registration at the start of the academic year, as evidenced by the Student Barometer undertaken in that year. A substantial amount of effort was invested in addressing the shortcomings and as a result the feedback from students in 2013 was much improved. However by the 2014 registration, there were some significant queues in some schools as a result of schools being left to organise registration times for their students.

While many colleagues at the University, particularly within the University's senior management team, do demonstrate a culture of continual improvement and development, more could be done to embed this as a culture at programme level. For example, course organisation is the second most raised issue at Programme Committees, where it was raised 169 times out of 414 meetings between 2012-15. However there has been a historic tendency to blame these issues on the centralised timetable rather than acknowledge and improve course-level organisation. To further develop this culture, members of the Student Representation and Engagement Group have met with programme tutors in every school to discuss students as partners, share best practice and to help develop partnership working.



SECTION 6: PUBLIC INFORMATION

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6.1 THE UNIVERSITY WEBSITE

The University of Hertfordshire website is mainly used as a public site with all student and staff information accessible through StudyNet and StaffNet. These sites are accessible through the main public website.

The website has recently been updated and is easy to navigate. It contains information on all University services as well as degree programmes and student life. The Students' Union website is also accessible through the main University website; however the navigation route for this is not as clear and prominent as it could be. The University website is regularly updated with news, however, in line with the target audience of the website, these are orientated to the public.

The University social media provides both public and internal information and regularly engages with users. Key information from the Students' Union is often shared by the University and vice versa.

6.2 COMPETITION AND MARKET AUTHORITY GUIDANCE

Following the publication of guidance from the Competition and Market Authority, the University of Hertfordshire has audited its processes and has acknowledged that whilst it does meet most of the regulations, there are some significant areas which need addressing and significant changes to the way it operates. An action plan has been drawn up which outlines the steps required to ensure compliance – these be resolved before the 2015/16 academic session. The key areas where action is required are:

- Ensuring that the University terms and conditions are fair and accessible and that staff have an understanding of the University's obligations.
- Ensuring that information provided to students is accurate and provided in a timely manner as well as developing a process to deal with changes to this information in light of academic quality processes.
- Ensuring that staff have an understanding of the complaints procedure and that a paper trail is maintained.
- Updating the University Policies and Regulations to ensure they comply with the CMA guidance.

The University response to the CMA guidance was approved directly by the Chief Executive Group and was then shared with members of the Campus Life Group. The implication of this is that students were not involved in this process and the development of the action plan.



SECTION 7: THEMATIC REVIEW - EMPLOYABILITY

As a business-facing university, employability is part of the foundation of the University. This has been reinforced following the publishing of the University's 2015-2020 Strategic Plan. In this plan, the University sets out its vision to be 'Internationally renowned as the UK's leading business facing university'.

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7.1 EMPLOYABILITY WITHIN ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES

The University has developed a set of attributes that its graduates will have that will stand them above other university graduates. These are:

- Professionalism, employability and enterprise
- Learning and research skills
- Intellectual depth, breadth and adaptability
- Respect for others
- Social responsibility

Through its Graduate Attributes, the University is committed to providing a rich and diverse experience. These are woven into the curriculum and everyday life at the University to ensure that graduates of the University of Hertfordshire are well rounded and developed individuals. Development teams for new programmes have to benchmark their programmes against these graduate attributes and outline how they will ensure their graduates meet the standards expected during the validation process.

The use of visiting lecturers, particularly within Creative Arts, but across most schools, ensures that students are able to learn from experienced professionals with industry knowledge. Access to experienced visiting lecturers or working closely with industry over a purely theoretical programme, provides our students with an enhanced employability, shaped by the needs of industry.

I have been 4 years and my experience each year has been different. The uni has helped me become independent and helped me get a job.

SU Survey 2015, Postgraduate student, Life and Medical Sciences

7.2 PLACEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The University highlighted within its Strategic Plan 2015-2020 that a key objective to becoming the UK's leading business-facing university is by offering workplace engagement to all students. The University currently has a placement policy group with an initial aim of ensuring that current provision and processes are suitable across the whole institution and a long term aim of exploring opportunities to develop and enhance placement opportunities.

Currently, students are responsible for organising their own placement; however Careers, Employability and Enterprise will assist and ensure that the placement provider is suitable and meet University standards.

The Students' Union Survey shows that in general students feel equipped for employment when they leave university. In the Students' Union Survey, students were asked if they are confident that they will be able to find work after University – most indicated that they were confident they would, with only 10% concerned that they would not. The only school where this is not as common place is the School of Creative Arts which is 76% against a University average of 81%.

7.3 THE STUDENTS' UNION ROLE WITHIN DEVELOPING EMPLOYABILITY

The Students' Union also provides students with a range of opportunities to develop their employability. From leading a society committee, to being a School Student Rep Organiser to leading a student-led volunteering project, the opportunities are open to all students. Further to this, the Union employs more than 200 student staff on a casual basis across the organisation. These roles extend from working behind a bar in entertainments venues to organising events within the University's residence halls to design work within the Union's Marketing team. The Students' Union Survey demonstrated that students do take advantage of extracurricular opportunities available to them with 60% engaging with at least one activity.

7.4 EMPLOYMENT AFTER UNIVERSITY

The University has a well-resourced and positioned Careers, Employability and Enterprise Service. The role of this team is to support students and ensure they receive the best support possible when planning their futures, whether this be applying for a job, further study or setting up their own business. They run skills workshops as well as work with employers to ensure that students have access to a wide array of graduate opportunities. In addition to this, they organise regular employment fairs on campus so students can meet with employers, network and find out about potential graduate opportunities. Satisfaction with the service is high as demonstrated in the Students' Union Survey which showed that 60% of respondents had used the Careers, Employability and Enterprise service and of that group, 92% would recommend the service to their friends.

Facilities such as the Careers office have helped me tremendously in shaping my CV and completing job applications of a much higher quality.

NSS 2015, Business Studies student

The Study Abroad and Careers team were extremely supportive upon my undertaking of the task that I wish to extend my career to Germany, a move which was daunting at first but with their promised support, it seems as if I will be able to accomplish my goals.

NSS 2015, History student

7.5 DLHE SURVEY

This year's DLHE results continue to show a very positive picture with 95.2% of leavers in either employment or further study. This is an excellent result and shows that the vocational nature of the University of Hertfordshire's courses ensures graduates are well prepared for work.

Comments from students in some schools, particularly Humanities subjects, indicate that they would like more relevant support from the Careers service, with more opportunities for placement in their chosen field, as well as more graduate employers being available on campus during jobs fairs, etc. There are also comments from student in some schools that they would like more advice related to their programme of study to assist them in searching for jobs upon completion.

Employability of students is strength of the University of Hertfordshire. A considerable amount of effort is put into ensuring that our students are as employable as possible and the graduate attributes are embodied in the curriculum and co-curricular activity. High scores in the NSS for personal development and excellent results in the DLHE clearly demonstrate that considerable efforts are made to ensure that students leave the University of Hertfordshire highly employable.



CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Student Submission offers an impartial insight into the student experience at the University of Hertfordshire, and is wholly informed by research carried out by the University and the Students Union.

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The University has demonstrated an ethos of continual improvement and should be congratulated for the work they have carried out in response to changing student needs. As with any evolving institution, there is always a need to keep working towards longer term solutions and to begin solving as-of-yet untouched concerns, and the Students' Union are committed to being active partners in this process to ensure students' views are always represented.

RECOMMENDATION 1: ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

The establishment of the working group and review of Assessment and Feedback featuring students and representatives from every school and the Students' Union is welcome. In addition to this, the positive results from the recent ASAC Audit of feedback turnaround time are excellent news for students. However, the quality of feedback provided remains below students' expectations. In the 2015 NSS, the scores for the question: 'Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair' is 6% below the sector mean and scores for the question: 'Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand' is 4% less than the sector mean. The Students' Union therefore recommend that this is made a priority in the institution-wide review of Assessment and Feedback, with a focus on providing personalised, good quality, timely and relevant feedback on all assignments.

RECOMMENDATION 2: TEACHING AND LEARNING

Ongoing developments in Teaching and Learning are demonstrating clear benefits for students and are evidenced by improving NSS results. Continued focus on teaching Investments and developments in this, including the sharing of best practice in terms of lecture quality and styles, should continue to ensure that upward trend of results continues. In addition to this, MFQ results (excluding Lecturer-specific data) should be made available to the Students' Union to allow the Union to work more closely with Student Reps, SSROs and Elected Officers to enable informed student representation at a programme level, where students are viewed as genuine partners in their learning.

RECOMMENDATION 3: COURSE COMMUNICATION AND ORGANISATION

Organisation and communication at a programme level has a direct impact on students' experience whilst at university and continues to be a persistent issue for the University, consistently highlighted in both the NSS and at Programme Committees. Efforts to communicate with students on a University-wide level are generally consistent. However, at a course-level, consideration should be given to more effective systems to appropriately communicate changes to students in a timely fashion and to ensure that key messages are communicated to minimise miscommunication at a school/programme level.

RECOMMENDATION 4: CONSISTENT APPROACH TO IMPLEMENTATION

The University undertakes a large number of major projects, most of which are implemented completely successfully. However, with any organisation of this size there are times when things don't go completely to plan, therefore the Union believes it would be beneficial to consider a systematic approach to reviewing the impact of major projects and decisions to ensure that new projects and systems consistently achieve their original intentions/ principles and remain in focus until fully established.

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