STUDENTS' UNION UCL

Student Submission for TEF 2023

Students' Union UCL

where **more** happens

Contents

Section 1: **Approach to evidence-gathering**

Students' Union UCL (SU) exists to promote the interests and welfare of students at UCL during their time studying and is the recognised representative channel between students and university. This student submission was developed by the elected Education Officer who is the Lead Student Representative supported by a secondment position within the SU which was funded by UCL. The process was overseen by an SU working group made up of elected officers and staff. We have a well-developed relationship with UCL as a trusted partner to ensure our students have an outstanding experience. We have worked closely with UCL on our work in preparation of this submission. They continue to ensure we are resourced and have access to information and data in order to engage with the TEF effectively. Prior to submission, this draft was reviewed by Union Executives (elected student officers who determine the policy priorities for the student body) and the Leadership Team of the SU to ensure that it reflects the current student experience. We confirm that this submission reflects the views of the UCL student population, and that the university did not unduly influence the contents of this submission.
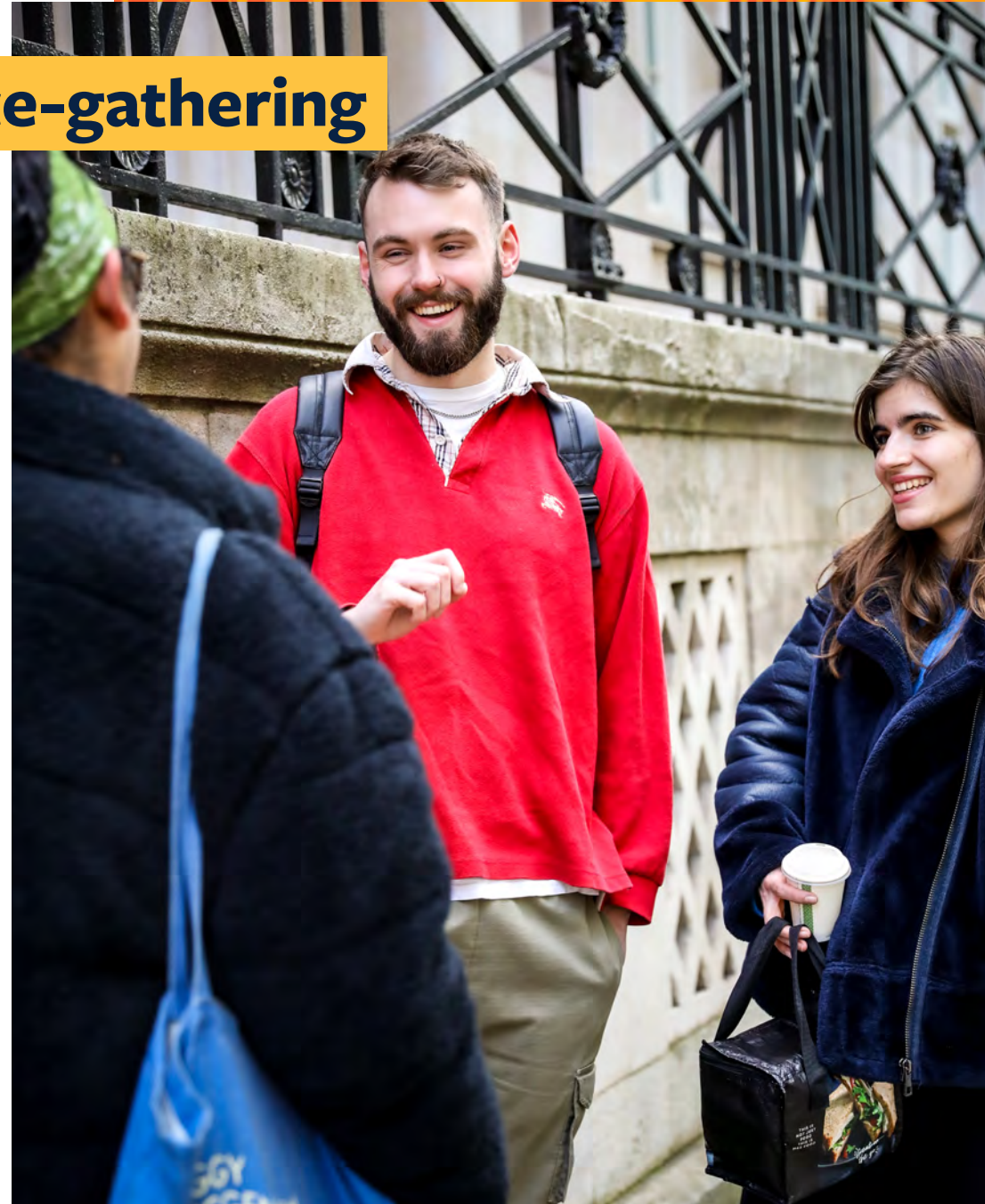
Section 1: **Approach to evidence-gathering** CONT.

Data Review

To inform our narrative of the student academic experience at UCL, we consulted 29 reports and data sources published by both the SU and UCL which collectively represent ~30,000 data points and 26,000 students. We developed our narrative by leaning more heavily on the data sources that were representative of UCL's undergraduate population with large data sets (such as our Priorities for Education annual reports, the New to UCL survey results and the National Student Survey results) and supplemented those reports with smaller data sets for additional nuance and detail. The table below details each report with notes on the data collection.

Source	Notes on data collection
National Student Survey 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022	**2019,** n= 3153 final year undergraduates **2020,** n= 3344 final year undergraduates **2021,** n= 3700 final year undergraduates **2022,** n= 3522 final year undergraduates
New to UCL Survey 2020, 2021	**2020,** n= 7608 newly enrolled students **2021,** n= 7032 newly enrolled students
Student Choice Awards Reports 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21	**2018-19:** 1478 nominations submitted for 764 different staff members across every faculty at UCL **2019-20:** 1267 nominations submitted for 718 different staff members across every faculty at UCL **2020-21:** 1482 nominations submitted for 731 different staff members across every faculty at UCL **2021-22:** 933 nominations submitted for 503 different staff members across every faculty at UCL
UCL Student Experience Surveys (SES) 2020-21, 2021-22	**2020-21:** 994 penultimate year undergraduate students **2021-22:** 1028 penultimate year undergraduate students
Student Priorities for Education Reports 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22	**2018-19:** Analysis drawn from 151 sets of SSCC minutes **2019-20:** Analysis drawn from 370 sets of SSCC minutes **2020-21:** Analysis drawn from 190 sets of SSCC minutes **2021-22:** Analysis drawn from 403 sets of SSCC minutes
Student Priorities for Wellbeing Reports 2018-19, 2020-21, 2021-22	**2018-19:** wellbeing-related data from internal and external surveys (e.g. NSS, New to UCL, UCL Student Experience Survey) **2020-21:** wellbeing survey, n=1,600 **2021-22:** wellbeing-related data from internal and external surveys and results from 8 focus groups, n=50

Section 1: **Approach to evidence-gathering** CONT.

Source	Notes on data collection
SU Impact Reports 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21, 2021-22	Internal data on student services and club & society memberships
Volunteering Service Survey 2019-20	646 students who received the volunteering newsletter
Graduate Outcomes Survey 2017-2020	Aggregate results from the Graduate Outcomes Survey 2017-18, 2018-19 and 2019-20
Assessments at UCL Student Survey 2022	2056 students responded with 73% of respondents were undergraduates, students from every faculty responded, students from Engineering and Math & Physical Sciences faculties submitted 40.5% of the responses
Wonkhe Trendence Survey, Winter 2022	Data pulled from a national survey with 456 UCL student respondents
UCL Disabled Students' Report 2020	Surveyed 33 self-identifying disabled students

Data Collection

Our additional evidence gathered to supplement the above data included:

- Conducting a student survey to ask what current students think of their academic experience at UCL (n=56, all faculties represented in the respondents).
- Hosting four student focus groups to discuss their academic experience (n=51, every faculty represented) and one dedicated focus group with disabled students (n=6).
- Workshops for Lead Department Representatives and Faculty Representatives focused on evaluating elements of their academic experience on a fail, pass, merit, distinction scale (n=68, every faculty attended but the following are slightly under-represented in the data: Faculty of Laws, Faculty of Mathematical & Physical Sciences, and Faculty of Medical Sciences).
- Discussion of draft summaries of the current academic experience at our three Policy Zones, each made up of elected student representatives (reps) who propose SU policy around key aspects of the student experience such as education, welfare and community building, and on how well the summaries aligned with the members' experiences (n=71, all faculties represented).
- Consulting with our entire membership on the second draft description of the current student experience over the winter break (n=144 who read the draft submission).

Section 2: **Student Experience**

Teaching & Learning

UCL provides an outstanding Teaching and Learning experience for students, and this has consistently been an area that students value and recognise UCL's strength in. 70% of all the positive comments received in the Student Experience Survey (SES) 2022 were about Teaching and Learning (n=202/288). This year, most students agree that they have a high-quality academic experience at UCL – 91% of Lead Department Reps and Faculty Reps and 86% of students surveyed agreed with this.

Programme & module content

The content taught on UCL degrees is consistently one of the areas that students are the most satisfied with. When looking at the Staff-Student Consultative Committee (SSCC) meeting minutes from 2018-19, student reps regularly praised the content they were taught. Similarly, in the SSCC minutes from 2019-20, programme and module content received the most positive comments. Students particularly praised modules which embedded issues of equity, equality, diversity and inclusion into the curriculum and staff who adapted their content to reflect recent events. These sentiments are reflected in the current student academic experience. Module content had the second highest satisfaction score (7.38/10) when we surveyed current students and 88% of Lead Department Reps and Faculty Reps feel that their academic experience is intellectually challenging and 78% feel that their course is up to date. These views were also reflected in discussions with the members of our Policy Zones.

Teaching delivery

Teaching delivery is another area that students typically praise and believe to be a strength in their academic experience at UCL. In the 2018-19 Student Choice Awards (where students can nominate members of staff for exemplary teaching/support), students focused on the enthusiasm of teaching staff and they celebrated staff who used diverse teaching approaches to deliver content in creative ways. Praise for teaching delivery continued throughout 2019-20, with reps going out of their way to praise the quick adaptation of teaching delivery at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic within their SSCCs. In 2020-21, teaching delivery

received the highest proportion of positive comments from SSCCs (n=1692/4441), however this was not consistent across the university as some reps highlighted issues with the lack of variety in teaching methods and the impact that had on understanding their module content. Whilst teaching delivery continued to be praised and areas of good practice celebrated in 2021-22, dissatisfaction about teaching delivery rose in the SES (negative comments about teaching delivery accounted for 84% of all the negative comments within Teaching & Learning (n=146/174)). Many current students feel that their course is being effectively delivered, with 78% of Lead Department Reps and Faculty Reps agreeing and teaching delivery scoring an average of 7.02/10 for satisfaction on the student survey. From the open comment section on the student survey, those who gave Teaching Delivery a lower satisfaction score did so as they want more varied teaching methods (which was one of the most popular areas for improvement). When asking students about the balance of in-person and online teaching at the Policy Zones, there was a consensus that online teaching is valued when it is used to supplement in-person taught content.

Workload

Over the past 4 years, students have increasingly reported concerns regarding their workload. In 2018-19, some student reps commented on their 'overbearing' workload. However, in 2020-21 this issue was more prevalent, with more reps reporting that the workload of their programmes was much higher than expected throughout the academic year. The issue of workload continued to increase in 2021-22, with reps reporting that issues around timetabling and assessment bunching exacerbates concerns about excessive workloads. One rep described the workload as "exhausting", stating that students have to study all night to catch up, and another stated that students are "overwhelmed" with the workload as deadlines "come together at once". For current students, workload continues to be an area of concern. In focus groups students highlighted how imbalanced their workloads felt this year and the impact that their study workload was having on their ability to work part-time (an emerging issue for students due to the rise in the cost of living). This emphasis on workload issues for students working part-time was also raised at our Policy Zones.

Section 2: **Student Experience** CONT.

Teaching & Learning

UCL is aware of the issue of workload for students and has two key upcoming projects which we are excited to work in partnership on. As part of their new Strategic Plan 2022-27, UCL plans to develop a new Teaching and Assessment Framework which will set out new shared principles for teaching and assessment. UCL has also proposed a review of the structure of the academic teaching year which will allow us to address student concerns about over-assessment. We feel these projects have the potential to have wide-ranging positive impacts on the academic experience and will improve students' ability to manage their workload efficiently and in a more healthy way. We look forward to working in partnership to shape the shared principles for teaching and assessment and to centre the student voice in any changes to the academic year structure.

Section 2: **Student Experience** CONT.

Assessment & Feedback

Assessment and feedback at UCL are the areas that students continually report being least satisfied with. Issues with the quality and availability of assessment criteria, timing and bunching of assessment deadlines, and the quality and promptness of feedback from staff feature in nearly every Student Priorities for Education Report we publish.

Assessment criteria

Student concerns around the availability, quality and clarity of assessment criteria has featured in every Student Priorities for Education Report since 2018-19. SSCC minutes from all faculties include common concerns that assessment criteria are unclear, and it is common for students to be unsure as to what is expected of them for an assessment. In 2019-20 students reported unclear and ambiguous mark schemes caused confusion and anxiety. Despite progress in this area, in the 2021-22 78% of comments on assessment criteria were negative (n=93/119). The issue of unclear assessment criteria was felt particularly strongly by first year undergraduate students. Current students have cited the same issues with assessment criteria. In focus groups, several students did not feel adequately informed on what their assessments were looking to test or how they were going to be marked. Other students partially agreed, emphasising that whilst assessment criteria might have been available, the content of the criteria would be generic and inadequate. These points were supported by conversations at the Policy Zones.

Assessment timetabling

One of the most common concerns from students regarding assessments is timetabling; another issue that has featured in every Student Priorities for Education Report since 2018. Through these reports we can see that students from every faculty were concerned about assessment bunching and pressure from simultaneous coursework deadlines. In 2019-20 students reported that the flexible assessment extensions that were implemented due to

the COVID-19 pandemic mostly helped the issue, however these extensions then often led to knock-on impacts with other, later assessments. In 2021-22, 80% of all comments in SSCCs relating to the timing of assessments were negative (n=179/226). This remains a key issue for current students, with discussions at the focus groups and Policy Zones highlighting common experiences with Term 3 exam bunching and issues of Term 1 assessment deadlines in Term 2 which result in overbearing assessment workloads and impacts on learning Term 2 content. Students agreed that there should be more coordination between module leads across a programme to improve their assessment timetable.

Assessment design

Assessment design was not raised as an issue until after the necessary change to online assessment due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students' main concerns in 2020-2021 included the suitability of the assessment design and lack of access to specialist equipment (i.e. software they weren't able to access remotely or computers/laptops in quiet areas). In 2021-22, assessment design became more of an issue (38% of SSCC comments on the topic were positive in 2020-21, compared to just 15% in 2021-22), with the main issue being the changes to timed assessments (there was a reduction in the number of 24-hour exams which was unpopular with students). When asked about areas of improvement for assessment design, students highlighted improving assessment-specific guidance, support for technical issues and adjusting the weightings of coursework to reflect the significant effort needed to complete this type of assessment.

Section 2: **Student Experience** CONT.

Assessment & Feedback

Assessment Feedback

Promptness and quality of assessment feedback is also commonly raised as an area of concern for students. Students value staff who give feedback in a prompt manner so that they can adapt for future assessments, however many report delays in receiving feedback and a lack of communication from staff regarding expected feedback timelines. One rep stated at an SSCC meeting in 2020 that students had not received any feedback from their coursework which had been handed in two months prior even though they were meant to use the feedback to prepare for an imminent exam. In a different SSCC meeting held in February 2021, it was noted that students hadn't received marks for work they had submitted in November 2020. These were not isolated concerns but were raised frequently in different SSCC meetings across different faculties. After a pause due to the pandemic, the service standards for feedback on assessments were reinstated for the 2021-22 academic year, which should ensure students receive feedback within one month of the assessment deadline. Furthermore, students have expressed a desire for more detailed and personalised feedback on their assessments, although this issue was not as prevalent as the issue of the promptness of feedback. In 2021-22, 56% of comments at SSCCs regarding the quality of feedback were negative (n=70/127), whereas 74% of the comments about the promptness of feedback were negative (n=55/73). Student reps also reported that receiving personalised feedback would help motivate students and provide more detail on areas for improvement, and others noted that students would prefer personalised comments on their work than a numerical grade on its own. The quality of assessment feedback was the most common answer when the current student survey asked for the areas that students would improve in their academic experience. Assessment feedback also had the lowest average satisfaction score in the same survey (6.03/10), showing that it continues to be one of the most important issues for students. The results from the student survey are supported by discussions at the focus groups and Policy Zones on the inconsistent way departments follow UCL guidance on assessment and feedback, with some expressing their frustration at receiving a tick mark as 'feedback'.

Given the longstanding concerns from students regarding assessment and feedback, UCL have announced 3 key projects in their new Strategic Plan 2022-27, for which we will work in partnership to deliver for students. A new Teaching and Assessment Framework, as mentioned above, will agree shared principles for teaching, learning and assessment. Feedback from students has previously highlighted that they recognise high staff workload to be one of the key barriers to timely, detailed feedback on their assessments- a revised structure for the academic year aims to spread out both student and staff workload more evenly throughout the academic year. Lastly, UCL have committed to the full implementation of the Assessment UCL digital platform which will allow improved management of assessment processes.

Section 2: **Student Experience** CONT.

Learning Resources

Students have consistently viewed their learning resources as a strength in their UCL academic experience, with the topic receiving the highest score in four out of the last five National Student Surveys. This is also reflected in the sentiments of current students as physical and digital learning resources received the highest satisfaction scores when we surveyed current students.

Digital learning resources

Students have been mostly satisfied with their digital learning resources since 2018-19. In SSCCs, reps spoke about how students are particularly pleased with their course Moodle pages, which they report to be organised, accessible, and helpful when used as a digital learning resource as well as a communication tool. Through the pandemic, students were particularly appreciative of pre-recorded lectures which they could watch and digest at their own pace, and to staff who uploaded class notes prior to seminars and tutorials which they reported being very useful. 2022 was the first year that students began to highlight some concerns in this area, and most of those concerns were about the quality and accessibility of in-person lecture recordings. Current students are similarly satisfied with the digital learning resource provision, with 78% of Lead Department Reps and Faculty Reps agreeing that the online resources they accessed were helpful and supported their education.

Physical learning resources

In contrast, the physical teaching and learning estate (mainly study spaces and teaching rooms) has been an historic issue for students. In 2018-19 and 2019-20, students consistently raised the issue of unsuitable teaching rooms at their SSCCs, with reps voicing concerns of room size and lack of appropriate equipment for note taking. Students also felt that there were not enough high quality and suitable spaces to study around campus. In 2021-22, students were recognised the high quality study spaces they had access to, with 68% of the positive comments on facilities being about libraries and study spaces (n=19/30), but also made it clear that the capacity of those spaces was an issue. When asked to score the physical learning resources they accessed through their academic experience, 59% of current Lead Department Reps and Faculty Reps gave fail (13%) or pass (46%) scores and 41% gave merit (34%) or distinction (7%) (NOTE: when asked about what they considered to be 'physical learning resources', almost all of the reps cited teaching rooms and

study spaces). In discussions at focus groups, students emphasised the current difficulties in finding suitable study space – particularly spaces for group study – and the need for the campus to be better adapted to blended learning, with more plug sockets in teaching rooms and more spaces for students to attend online teaching events on campus.

Looking forwards, we were pleased to see UCL acknowledge these issues in its Strategic Plan 2022-27, stating that it was "clear [...] that we are now reaching the limits on what we can accommodate" in terms of student number growth and that "the physical teaching estate, our digital infrastructure [...] has fallen behind the expansion of student numbers". To address this, UCL are working on a new Estates Strategy, which will focus on the quality of current spaces and the backlog of repairs and maintenance that have built up. The plan will also include the upgrade of digital infrastructure to support a more hybrid style of learning. We are looking forward to working in partnership with UCL to develop and implement this plan which we feel will greatly benefit students and ensure that their physical learning resources match the standards they deserve studying at a world-class university.
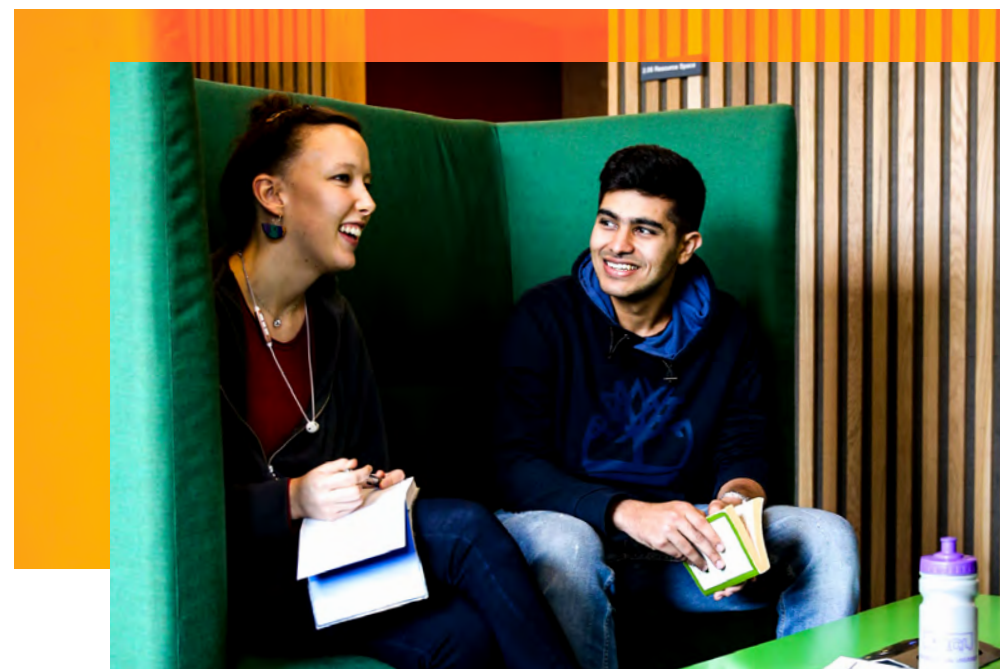
Section 2: **Student Experience** CONT.

Academic Support

At UCL there are many areas that provide academic support and that facilitate the student academic experience. From the NSS, it is clear that students know how to access departmental support, on average 85% of students knew who to contact to receive support over the past 4 years, however issues persist with the availability of good academic advice when making study choices.

Departmental support

When undergraduate students join UCL, they are assigned a Personal Tutor and a student Transition Mentor within their department. Access and use of this support has fluctuated in recent years and, whilst pockets of best practice exist, there are inconsistencies in the student experience of academic support provided. In 2018-19, 78% of new undergraduate students reported having met with their Personal Tutor in the first few months, and 78% had had the opportunity to meet with their Transition Mentor. These rates peaked in 2020-21, with 86% of new undergraduates having met with their Personal Tutor and 91% having met with their Transition Mentor in the first few months at UCL. This decreased in 2021-22, to 73% agreeing that they had met their Personal Tutor, and 83% having met or arranged to meet with their Transition Mentor. Regarding the quality of support provided by Personal Tutors, where the support is proactive, compassionate and focused on their academic and career development, this is an area that students benefit hugely from and deeply value as part of their UCL experience. In NSS comments from 2018-2021, students speak about how Personal Tutors have helped them both academically and pastorally, however other students have described the system as "inadequate", and "non-functional". Some reported feeling like they were bothering their Personal Tutor when asking for meetings, and others report that a high turnover of Personal Tutors has been disruptive and hindered the support they could access. Some students reported that they felt their Personal Tutor had little or no knowledge of their subject area and therefore could provide limited academic and career guidance. Current students have described their experiences with personal tutors as 'hit or miss', those from departments that embed personal tutors in wider departmental processes (such as module selection) had more 'useful' meetings than students in departments where personal tutors are not. When personal tutors are good, it is clear this is transformational to a students' experience and benefits them both pastorally and academically. When

asking students about their favourite part of their academic experience, the most common answer was the staff who supported their education. Through conversations in focus groups, students know and understand the support that is available to them through their departments. And the central support they can access from the university (i.e. Student Support and Wellbeing), however some raised concerns about the AskUCL student enquiries service (particularly response time and accessing specialist information).

Academic advice

Students at UCL are generally less satisfied with the advice and guidance available to them when making decisions about their studies, particularly around module allocation and selection. UCL offers a wide range of modules for students to choose from, with some students able to pick from hundreds of modules, however, they have reported that sometimes the breadth of choice leads to difficulties in deciding which modules to take. Students have consistently reported feeling that they do not have enough information about the modules they can pick to make an informed choice. The SES 2022 found that 31% of students did not agree that they received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to their course (11% disagreed and 20% neutral), and 35% did not agree that good advice was available when they needed to make study choices (12% disagreed and 23% neutral). Student reps have noted that module selection can be extremely stressful for students, especially where there is a wealth of options, and that it often isn't clear what to expect from each module, including the course content and timings and modes of assessments. Academic advice remains an issue for current students. When asking Lead Department Reps and Faculty Reps to score their access to academic advice when making study choices, 62% scored it fail (5%) or pass (57%) whereas 38% scored it merit (33%) or distinction (5%). Students do recognise recent improvements to the information available, however it remains inconsistent between faculties.

Communication

Since the pandemic, communication has become a more prevalent concern for students. Students reported that they did not feel informed of changes in teaching due to the pandemic and this persisted throughout 2020-21 and 2021-22, with students reporting issues particularly around their course, and expressed confusion due to many different

communication channels being used and how information would be distributed. Student reps also raised issues of the consistency of information across different platforms, such as the course information on Moodle showing different information than the timetable. Others noted that they were receiving too much information, with one rep in 2021-22 saying that their students received around 4 or 5 newsletters per week, and that it was hard to keep track of them. This was particularly difficult when some staff were also creating communication channels of their own, such as through Microsoft Teams, instead of using existing Moodle pages. From our discussions with current students in focus groups, it's clear that students want clarity on where to find important information such as deadlines, class timetables and course requirements, and for communication channels to be streamlined.

Timetabling

The timetabling of teaching was one of the most common issues raised at SSCCs in 2018-19 and again in 2019-20. In 2019-20, students specifically raised problems with clashing modules as the timetable was released too late to easily change module selections. These problems have continued as in 2021-22, 80% of all comments received on timetabling were negative at SSCCs (n=99/125), with reps commonly citing issues with blended learning (balancing separate in-person and online learning timetables). Whilst recent changes have led to improvements in the release of termly timetables, current students remain affected by shortcomings in room allocation processes as this topic was one of the most common responses when we surveyed students on what could be improved in their academic experience.

UCL has many exciting upcoming projects to improve student academic support that we are working in partnership on. Regarding module selection, UCL are developing a new process for module selection which is user-friendly and informative, allowing students to make an informed, confident decision. For timetabling, UCL is overhauling their current approach, moving towards a system that produces an optimised timetable that is rolled over annually. This will allow any changes in rooms available, student numbers and courses offered to be planned for in advance, reducing last minute changes, timetable clashes, or issues with lack of suitable roles.

Section 2: **Student Experience** CONT.

Student Voice

Students recognise student voice as an area of best practice at UCL and appreciate opportunities to feedback on and shape their educational and wider student experience. There are many opportunities for students to have their voice heard at UCL including, through the student academic rep structures, our Policy Zones where students can submit, debate and vote on issues related to their experience, the Student Quality Reviewers (SQR) programme for students to provide detailed feedback and analysis on academic practice, and the ISD (Information Services Division) Student Sounding Board set up for students to provide direct feedback on UCL's digital provisions.

At UCL we have 2000 academic reps who gather student opinion and work with staff at the university, primarily through attending regular meetings such as the departmental SSCCs, to improve the student educational experience. Student reps report being happy with the SSCC process and feel that the issues they raise were heard and acted upon by staff and fed back that students were encouraged to see their feedback acted upon quickly. 79% of current Lead Department Reps and Faculty Reps felt that they had the right opportunities to provide feedback on their course. However, understanding of the role of the student academic reps is not widespread across the general student population. Whilst students who are aware of the feedback processes value and appreciate them, closing the feedback loop, regularly communicating to all students the changes made in response to student feedback, and promoting these processes to the wider student body would increase transparency and encourage more students to get involved in shaping their academic experience.

Students can also shape their education through our SQR programme, which we run jointly with UCL, focuses on quality assurance and quality enhancement, with students working with UCL to take an in-depth look at different areas of academic practice, and providing detailed feedback and analysis from a student perspective. There are many ways that students can engage with the SQR programme, they can: work with teaching staff to discuss their current teaching practices, review new programmes at UCL by working with the Programme and Module Approval Panel, take part in departmental Internal Quality Reviews, or review the inclusivity of criteria and provide a student view on how teaching can include more diverse views. These processes continue to adapt and change through increasing student data and representation.

Student participation in institution-wide decision-making changed through the pandemic with sabbatical officers participating at every level of UCL's crisis management structure. Through working closely together as critical friends, the university and sabbatical officers made informed decisions that centred the impact on students and staff, these same decisions were later recognised by the Office for Students as good practice.

Working in partnership with UCL, we are always looking forwards at ways we can strengthen and develop the ways in which students can shape their education. UCL is launching a new Student Staff Partnership Committee, which will be co-chaired by the SU to ensure we have strategic oversight, clear direction and accountability in enhancing effective partnership work in response to student feedback. UCL has also recently agreed to a partial funding increase to support our work with Academic Reps, allowing us to increase staff resource to support the 2000 reps at UCL.

Section 2: **Student Experience** CONT.

The Disabled Students' Experience

Historically disabled students at UCL have raised issues with their academic experience and the support available to them and often display below average satisfaction scores in the NSS. Over the last four years, UCL has been working with the disabled student community to improve their experience and there has been an increase in disabled student representation across a variety of committees and representational groups, improving the opportunities for disabled students to raise issues and work with the university on finding solutions. Regarding the current academic experience of disabled students, the most common issues are those related to the return to campus and the SoRA (Summary of Reasonable Adjustments). The return to a more in-person academic experience has been met with a mixed response from disabled students, some frustration was raised about the reduction in online learning material, whilst others cited the benefits to better departmental cohesion. The accessibility of the physical campus was an almost universal issue for the disabled students we talked to, with particular issues with the lack of quiet space, suitable equipment in teaching rooms and navigating campus after dark. The biggest concern for current students is the inconsistent adherence to the SoRAs within academic departments, with students having to tell departments of their SoRA and struggling to receive the adjustments they need. There was recognition of improved processing, however persistent issues remain in finding relevant information prior to applying.

UCL established a Student Support Review in January 2020 to revise the university's regulations and procedures relating to student support. A key recommendation from the review was to bring together UCL's main academic support processes under one banner, the Student Support Framework. This Framework (implemented in the Academic Manual for this year and onwards) has resulted in an update and modernisation of the SoRA procedures to enhance the experience of disabled students. These changes seek to improve understanding between students, the academic department, and Student Support & Wellbeing to ensure students can receive the adjustments they require in a timely manner.

Section 3: **Student Outcomes**

Belonging

With the full-time undergraduate student population growing from 18,240 in 2017-18 to 21,650 in 2020-21, the university has grown by over 3,400 undergraduate students in four years. In the same period, student belonging at UCL has fluctuated and was dramatically impacted by the pandemic.

Prior to March 2020, student belonging was improving with students increasingly feeling a part of a community of staff and students and finding more opportunities to find their own communities within the SU. In 2018-19, students felt that the induction programme helped them find a sense of belonging (with 80% of undergraduates agreeing that they found that the social events in the first week helped them to settle in and find friends) and that the staff in their department made them feel welcome (96% agreed). In the same academic year, 62.2% of students felt part of a community of staff and students. Within wider belonging initiatives, student engagement with the SU activities (volunteering, clubs and societies) was growing with a 25% increase in the number of students becoming members of at least 1 club or society and students giving 1,000 more volunteering hours.

Through the pandemic many students struggled with feelings of isolation due to a lack of social contact. Through the Wonkhe Trendence survey in winter 2020, we saw that 59.7% of UCL students felt lonely at least once a week and 31.8% were satisfied with their wider student experience. In the Student Priorities for Wellbeing report 2020-21, we saw that international students struggled with a sense of belonging, particularly when studying in a different time-zone, and only 38% of students agreed that there was a strong sense of community at UCL. Whilst the number of individual students involved in clubs and societies dropped by 9% in 2020-21, the number of memberships (as students can be a member of multiple clubs and societies) grew by 38%. This increase is partially due to the launch of free remote memberships, meaning that students could join a club or society for free and join any of the online activity to help meet new people. 56% of all club and society memberships were remote, showing how popular the initiative was for students that year.

A one-off grant from UCL in winter 2020 enabled the SU to develop the departmental societies programme, increasing capacity and resources to support more departmental societies across the university. These departmental societies are vital to student belonging and to strengthening the sense of community between students and staff. In 2021, the majority of students involved in a departmental society agreed that being a member improved their sense of belonging and broadened their academic experience. By June 2022, the SU had affiliated a total of 29 departmental societies, with memberships of these groups increasing by 410% from the previous year. Through working closely with UCL, each departmental society is linked with key staff from their department and nine of these societies receive funding from their academic department (helping to further embed them into students' academic experience).

In 2021-22, student belonging began to markedly improve with the SU engaging more students than ever before and 90% of first year undergraduates who participated in the New to UCL Survey that year felt welcome and part of the wider UCL community. A record high of 41% of all UCL students were involved in at least one club or society, the total number of club and society memberships increased by 73% when compared to 2020-21 and students gave a record of 69,500 volunteering hours (the previous record was 63,400 hours in 2018-19). When asking current students about their sense of belonging, the majority agreed that there is a stronger sense of community and belonging as things 'get back to normal' with face-to-face teaching and the return to campus. Whilst current first year undergraduates have developed a stronger sense of community within their department than those who began studying during the pandemic, students did raise that there needs to be more departmental social spaces (i.e. common rooms) and more departmental social events to help increase a sense of belonging to an academic community. As shown in the narrative above, student belonging has changed over the past four years and there are some very exciting projects coming up in the Student Life Strategy which will continue this positive trajectory.

Section 3: **Student Outcomes** CONT.

Student Life Strategy

In January 2023, the SU and UCL published a Student Life Strategy which sets out how we prioritise the co- and extra-curricular elements of the student experience and how UCL can facilitate and support student aspirations in the next 5 years. At the core of the strategy is an agreed definition of Student Life at UCL which centers co- and extra-curricular provision as a driver for greater student sense of belonging and community building.

One of the six priority areas detailed in the strategy is Departmental Societies, which has the aim to have an affiliated departmental society in all departments by 2027 to ensure that every student at UCL can easily build a sense of community with fellow students and staff. These departmental societies will also be used as a vehicle to strengthen student academic rep and staff partnerships and student voice at the departmental level.

The Student Life strategy is the largest ever expansion of co- and extra-curricular activities at UCL, with commitments to strengthen areas such as sport, creative arts, community volunteering and intercultural engagement, and is the outcome of years of collaboration and strong working relationships between the SU and the university. The SU is excited to continue to work closely with UCL with the aspiration to foster an environment where students can discover themselves, broaden their minds, develop their understanding of who they are, and the role they play as changemakers at UCL and beyond.

Section 3: **Student Outcomes** CONT.

Educational Gains

The educational gains definition outlined in UCL's TEF submission was developed in partnership with the SU and students through a series of workshops with Academic Reps and the student survey, we also directly fed into the drafting of the definition due to our presence on the TEF working group. We agree that UCL students want to make an impact through their academic experience at UCL, whether it's through their academics, their further career or what they do within the local community. The five different 'Impacts' reflect the wide variety of outcomes that students want from their UCL degrees; specialist subject knowledge, opportunities to widen their professional networks or help the local community, and the skills to find innovative solutions to global problems. We are confident that each student will find the outcomes they seek from their academic experience at UCL reflected in this definition.

Students and sabbatical officers will be key partners in reflecting this collaborative definition of educational gains in the Teaching & Assessment Framework and embedding these gains into the Student Life Strategy.

Student Submission for TEF

2023

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