



Student Voice Report 2021

September 2021

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Executive Summary

The University of Birmingham Guild of Students (the Guild) plays a vital role in ensuring improvements to the quality of learning and teaching at the University of Birmingham (the University / UoB) are informed by the student voice. Improving the student experience is at the heart of the Guild and its purpose, and the Student Voice Report (SVR) is a key product of our aspiration to continually improve the academic experience for students at Birmingham in partnership with the University. Initially arising from the completion of the 2009 Student Written Submission for the Quality Assurance Agency's Institutional Higher Education Audit, this is now the twelfth report produced by the Guild.

The Guild would like to note the significant efforts made by Schools, Colleges and the central University to provide adapted teaching and learning for students throughout the 2020-21 academic year in the midst of a global pandemic. Guild Officers enjoyed productive relationships with University departments and colleagues during the academic year, working together to make improvements for students. By collating feedback from the 2020/21 academic year, we are able to establish clear recommendations for enhancements that should be achieved through partnership between students and the University. We have identified the following areas of focus ahead of the 2021/22 academic year:

- Student Voice: Engagement, Communications and Partnership-working
- Access & Participation
 - Black Student Satisfaction, Attainment and Experience
 - The Experience of Disabled Students
- Assessment & Feedback
- Postgraduate Taught Students: Academic Community

It should be noted that the impact of Covid-19 has delayed a number of datasets usually employed in the SVR, such as Student Support Fund Annual Reports and the Annual Review process. This has meant that the Guild has not been able to fully assess/review areas of good practice that exist across the University in the 2021 Report.

A report detailing the progress of recommendations from the Student Voice Report 2020 was received by the Student Representation Scheme Advisory Board (SRSAB) in July 2021. In addition, the Guild and the Director of Student Engagement met to approve continuation of work on a small number of uncompleted SVR 2020 recommendations, which will continue into the start of the 2021/22 academic year.

Data has been primarily collected from the following sources for the purpose of the report:

- National Student Survey (NSS), 2019 – 2021
- Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES), 2019-2021
- Guild of Students Student Rep Survey, 2019 – 2021
- Student Evaluation of Learning and Teaching (SELT), Semester 1 & Semester 2, 2021
- Guild of Students Disabled Students' Commission
- University Committee Papers, 2019-2021

Partnerships between the Guild and the University

The Guild has a positive and professional relationship with the University, and a strong sense of partnership working has developed across a range of services in recent years. This can be challenging at times, as the operational and political priorities of both parties rightly do not always align. Despite this there is a clear willingness on both sides to maintain open lines of communication and to support positive initiatives for the benefit of our students. Students and Postgraduate Researchers are well represented on University committees, and are supported to participate fully through Guild briefings and direct links to University staff. Elected Officers, Student Representatives and members of the Guild management team meet regularly with University colleagues and work closely together on key operational issues.

Student Representation System

The Student Representation System is a long-running partnership between the University and the Guild, involving the participation of over 1,200 Student Reps and staff across the Guild, Registry and Schools. 86% Student Reps are satisfied with the scheme, as are 80% students from the general population. The new recruitment process has also positively increased the proportions of BAME, disabled, low socio-economic background, and postgraduate students participating with the Scheme.

Not On Campaign

Not On is a joint campaign launched by the University and the Guild to raise awareness about sexual harassment and consent. Led by 5 student Ambassadors, the Not On campaign delivers 1 hour workshops comprising consent, sexual harassment and healthy relationships information to over 250 students.

Community Wardens

The Community Wardens Scheme is delivered by the Guild, in partnership with Campus Services working to build a safer, cleaner and greener community for students and residents in Selly Oak and Bournbrook. The Scheme supports the community by organising student volunteer litter picks, distributing safety and housing information, operating the Selly Express and arranging Junkbusters collections, raising funds for the British Heart Foundation.

Hall Reps

The Halls Reps Scheme is delivered by the Guild, in partnership with Campus Services. The Halls Reps student staff deliver a tailored programme of events to engage students living within University accommodation, including Welcome events, large scale activities such as the Freshers Fling and targeted events for Postgraduate and International students.

Student Mentor Scheme

The Student Mentor Scheme is delivered by the Guild in partnership with Campus Services. The purpose of the Student Mentor Scheme is to provide advice and guidance to students living in University residences. The Scheme helps with a wide range of issues including shared living and accommodation-related issues, academic matters, financial matters and the general wellbeing of students whilst studying and living at the University.

1. Student Voice: Engagement, Communications and Partnership-working

Over the last two academic years, the Guild and the University have worked in partnership to deliver the new Student Representation System (SRS) model, with the aim of recruiting, training and empowering 1200+ Student Reps on campus. Despite the impact of Covid-19, the Scheme had a positive year in 2020 with over 1300 Student Reps recruited across all 5 Colleges. Indeed, a record high of **1084 Student Reps (83%) completed their online training this year, with 80.7% of these Reps feeling that the training helped them to acquire the skills and knowledge they needed for the role** and 82.4% Reps being satisfied with the Scheme in general. It is clear from student comments that where the SRS is working well, it supports positive engagement within the academic community:

"Student reps have been really useful in communicating with the programme leads about what changes we would like to see/what doesn't go so well." (NSS 2021)

"During the intensive modules, we were simultaneously required to complete assignments from previous modules. This resulted in a stressful time period. However, once this had been communicated to the school by the majority of the cohort through student reps - the school implemented further extensions to the deadlines to ease the workload." (PTES 2021)

The Guild remains committed to working with the Director of Student Engagement, Student Representation Scheme Advisory Board (SRSAB) and University colleagues to continually improve the SRS by utilising feedback from Student Reps, students and staff throughout 2021/22. **Key work for the academic year includes a review of our online core and enhanced training provision, improved training and support for SLCs in partnership with Registry and the introduction of College Forums every semester.** Full updates on progress and engagement with Schools & Colleges will continue to be provided regularly to SRSAB by the Guild and Registry.

However, there remains a worrying downwards trend in the Student Voice questions in NSS 2021 and PTES 2021: the University is now ranked bottom of the Russell Group for satisfaction with the "Student Voice" question bank, with only 57% of students satisfied. Though these scores do, to some extent, undoubtedly reflect the specific circumstances of the 2020/21 academic year and the difficulties faced by both staff and students in January 2021, **it remains apparent that many students do not feel listened to during their time at Birmingham. There remain significant institutional barriers to actively empowering the Student Voice, creating an environment where students feel equal partners in the University community and clearly communicating when and how student feedback will be actioned.**

| | | NSS 2021 | PTES 2021 ¹ |
|---|---------------------------|----------|------------------------|
| I have had the right opportunities to feedback on my course | 2021 | 72.61 | 76.0 |
| | Difference to 2020 | -9.64 | -3.7 |
| | Difference to sector 2021 | -6.9 | |
| Staff value students' views and opinions about the course ² | 2021 | 57.78 | 80.6 |
| | Difference to 2020 | -11.26 | -1.2 |
| | Difference to sector 2021 | -9.82 | |
| It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted upon | 2021 | 40.39 | 66.2 |
| | Difference to 2020 | -11.05 | -1.0 |
| | Difference to sector 2021 | -10.83 | |
| The Students' Union effectively represents students' academic interests | 2021 | 43.33 | 59.5 |
| | Difference to 2020 | -7.59 | +4.0 |
| | Difference to sector 2021 | -9.84 | |

These scores are of significant concern, both to the University and the Guild, and we note that this is an issue requiring urgent attention for both institutions.

a. Communications and Closing the Feedback Loop

Clearly communicating how the Student Voice is engaged with, the routes for student feedback and closing the feedback loops should remain an institutional priority for both the University and the Guild in 2021/22. Only 40.39% of Undergraduate students feel that *It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on*, a 20% drop over the last two years. Though PGT scores in this area remain stable, we are pleased to note that the Graduate School have identified strengthening the Student Voice as an area of focus for this year, and are keen to support this activity via the Student Representation System, in partnership with the Postgraduate Officer and the Dean of Postgraduates.

Student comments regarding Student Voice reflect that Student Reps are working hard to collect and share feedback, and that these Reps are positively viewed by the wider student body – however, frustration often arises when there is a perception that student feedback, whether direct or submitted via Reps, is disregarded or not acted upon:

“Student Rep meetings with student representatives from the course who were bringing forward very valuable and true constructive feedback were not taken seriously into consideration for the department to improve, but redirected the students to bring the feedback to the module tutor directly. This completely devalues and undermines the whole procedure behind the student representative system, and makes students feel like it's on their hands to resolve any issues they've had with the course.” (PTES 2021)

“There is no communication with students individually and any concerns that do get raised through student reps and the appropriate channels are immediately dismissed by the university.” (NSS 2021)

¹ PTES comparison to 2019 data, due to small sample size in 2020

It should be noted that these frustrations with communication and closing the feedback loop are even more strongly felt by students on Joint Honours courses and, as discussed below, by Disabled Students.

The Guild acknowledges that there are a number of areas of excellent practice in Student Voice and closing the feedback loop, and that good practice in this area often correlates to a strong Student Experience Officer presence, a well-supported & clearly communicated Rep Scheme, clear “feedback loop” closing communications and active partnership working with the Guild.

We also note that there are many University colleagues across the institution, both academic and professional services, who make substantive contributions to the Student Rep System and who work collaboratively with the Guild and Registry to deliver the SRS in line with the Code of Practice and to develop best practice that benefits their cohorts of students. However, both Registry and the Guild have noted that there remain a significant number of staff responsible for delivering the SRS who are not aware of the baseline expectations of the Scheme, their responsibilities in terms of delivering and monitoring and the need to develop proactive, collaborative relationships with relevant Registry and Guild staff in this area. We therefore recommend that the Director of Student Engagement, Registry and the Guild develop compulsory basic training for any member of staff involved in the delivery of the Student Rep System. We are keen to support this training with briefings on the Student Representation System to Heads of School and Heads of Quality in partnership with Registry.

It is vitally important for the Guild and University to work together at an institutional level to promote existing Student Voice mechanisms, to close the feedback loop and to clearly communicate to students where and how their feedback has been acted upon. We note that the University does not currently promote centrally the Student Representation System, its nature as a partnership between the University & Guild and the success of staff and students working in partnership to improve the academic experience. We have identified this as a critical element for the University in improving awareness of the Rep Scheme and the many student-led changes that take place on campus each year. These communications should highlight the Guild’s significant role in recruiting, training and supporting Reps and in the University’s Student Voice processes.

In addition, the Guild is keen to work with the Director of Student Engagement to develop an online Student Voice portal template on Canvas, to be rolled out within every School to clearly communicate feedback raised by students, to promote local level Student Reps and to close the feedback loop, articulating when changes can or cannot take place. The Guild has also identified enhanced training for Student Reps as a strategic priority for this year. We also believe that the new College Forums and group tutorial meetings are an excellent opportunity for the central University to provide updates to students on key developments to central services and processes (e.g. timetabling, module optionality, learning resources, and wellbeing services) that are so crucial to a positive student experience.

The Guild recognises the substantial investment made by the University in the Student Academic Experience Interns, with the purpose of supporting local level interventions to improve the student experience. We are keen that the interns compliment, rather than duplicate, existing Student Voice initiatives and positively influence existing initiatives, rather than beginning new projects not sustainable beyond their tenure. We would welcome the opportunity to establish a positive working relationship with the Interns, including delivering training briefings on key aspects of the Guild and developing regular touch points for sharing information and activities. It is essential that the Guild is able to shape the vision for the Interns’ programme of work, and recommend early discussions with relevant University colleagues to agree key projects and activities for this academic year.

b. The Guild & Question 26

The Guild's performance on Question 26 – *The Students' Union (Association or Guild) effectively represents students' academic interests* – has declined this year, falling to 43.33%. As with the University, we note the impact of the pandemic on this result. However, we take seriously the feedback from students about the Student Voice, how they are represented by us to the University and the clarity around work undertaken by Officers and its impact.

The Guild's Trustee Board have identified improving Question 26 performance as a key strategic project for the academic year, with best practice research and communications plan delivery to begin from October 2021. The Trustee Board and the Guild Officer team would also welcome additional resource from the University to support the delivery of this work, with the aim of delivering improvements in student satisfaction in NSS 2022 across the Guild and Student Voice questions. The Guild Officers are also developing plans to improve communications to students about key wider campaigning work undertaken by the Guild.

As noted in previous reports, success with the former Question 23 scores were a result of a partnership with the University on a joint communications campaign recognising the work of both institutions in responding to the Student Voice – and we believe that this joint approach would serve us well in responding to the current challenges in this area. We recognise that communications in this area is nuanced and we are aware from best practice elsewhere that the Guild as the students' union would benefit from being properly referenced. Further we would also appreciate the continued support of the University in utilising group tutorial meetings and central University communications channels to promote the Student Rep System, the Guild and the Guild Elections.

Recommendations:

- The University to deliver a partnership communications campaign via central communications channels, recognising the work of the Student Representation System, acknowledging the role of Student Reps and the improvements delivered in response to student feedback. These communications should note the Guild's substantive role in recruiting, training and supporting Reps and in the University's Student Voice processes.
- The Guild to undertake a communications and research campaign to improve Question 26 performance, as a strategic priority, with delivery to begin from October 2021. The Trustee Board and the Guild Officer team would also welcome additional resource from the University to support the delivery of this work.
- The Guild and Registry to create core staff training for all University colleagues involved in the delivery of the Student Representation System and the Guild's Student Voice team and Registry to deliver briefings on the Student Representation System to Heads of School and Heads of Quality.
- The Guild and the Director of Student Engagement to collaborate on the development of an online Student Voice portal.
- The Guild to establish a positive working relationship with the Student Academic Experience Interns, including delivering training briefings on key aspects of the Guild and developing regular touch points for sharing information and activities, and to meet with University colleagues as soon as possible to shape the programme of work for the academic year.
- The Guild's Postgraduate Officer, Dean of Postgraduates and Graduate School to work together to implement agreed Student Voice improvements for PGT students.

2. Student Access, Participation & Engagement

Access, Participation, Engagement & Success has been a priority for the University and the Guild for a number of years, and recently work has been given a new focus through the Office for Students' Access & Participation Plan (APP) monitoring requirements. This year, the Guild was able to work constructively with University colleagues and students to write an APP Student Submission, which outlined a number of areas of partnership work in this area. Previous Student Voice Reports have also noted areas of focus around the Black Student and Disabled Student Experience. The following sections will outline the areas within Student Access, Participation and Engagement that we believe require the most urgent attention this academic year, highlighting good practice and providing constructive recommendations where improvement is required.

i. Black Students

The attainment and experience of Black students has consistently featured in Student Voice Reports from 2015. The Guild views this work as vital, and continues to support the [Black Voices campaign](#), aiming to empower Black students to lead this work. The Guild also recognises the complexity of this issue which reflects broader societal trends, and therefore requires long-term engagement and concerted effort to ensure substantive improvement. We would also like to recognise the important work that has been ongoing for a number of years in this area, and the plans already in place by the university to tackle this in the coming years – to date, this work has included the Race Equality Charter action plan, the Inclusive Educator Framework and the EDI training module.

Despite this progress, we believe it is vital to continually revisit this area to review emerging trends and progress, and to ensure clear priorities are identified each academic year. Though there are gaps in attainment and satisfaction for White, and Black, Asian & Minority Ethnic (BAME) students more widely, this theme focuses specifically on support for Black students as there are significant satisfaction and attainment gaps for this group over a prolonged period of time.

a. Learning, Assessment and Course Content

Over recent years, significant progress has been made to close the gaps between Black and White student satisfaction with Learning and Teaching. The Student Voice Report 2020 praised the work done in this area: in particular, noting positive gains around responses to *My course has challenged me to achieve my best work* which saw an improvement of 11.52% among Black Students compared to previous years. Unfortunately this year's NSS has seen drops in satisfaction across many of the areas where progress had previously been achieved, and gaps have widened across areas relating to learning and teaching. These gaps are often not reflected in the wider sector data, suggesting that the issue is more specific to the University of Birmingham.

| | The teaching on my course | 1. Staff are good at explaining things. | 2. Staff have made the subject interesting. | Learning opportunities | 7. My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt. | Academic support | B4 Course Content and Structure | B10 Workload | B10.1 The workload on my course is manageable. | .B13 Intellectual Motivation | B13.1 I have found the course motivating. | B13.2 The course has stimulated my interest in the field of study. | B13.3 The course has stimulated my enthusiasm for further learning. |
|---|---------------------------|---|---|------------------------|--|------------------|---------------------------------|--------------|--|------------------------------|---|--|---|
| <i>UoB Black Students</i> | 69.86 | 76.64 | 58.22 | 73.21 | 64.49 | 60.2 | 65.73 | 29.23 | 32.39 | 49.77 | 47.89 | 59.15 | 42.25 |
| <i>UoB Black/White Student gap</i> | -9.99 | -7.08 | -20.37 | -3.14 | -5.9 | -5.74 | -5.92 | -18.66 | -24.35 | -14.79 | -13.87 | -15.95 | -14.55 |
| <i>UoB /Sector Black Student Difference</i> | -8.95 | -5.66 | -14.56 | -8.22 | -15.41 | -12.23 | -12.1 | -20.61 | -22.6 | -25.05 | -26.93 | -19.52 | -28.72 |
| <i>UoB Black Student satisfaction – 2021 v 2020</i> | -9.82 | -9.46 | -14.51 | -8.61 | -14.12 | -8.96 | N/A | -8.63 | -16.18 | N/A | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| <i>Sector Black/White Student Gap</i> | -2.08 | -2.97 | -7.15 | 2.07 | 3.3 | -1.53 | -0.34 | -7.93 | -9.69 | 1.32 | 0.94 | -1.73 | 4.75 |

NSS 2021 also provides a wealth of data points regarding how courses are delivered and structured, thanks to the 2021/22 choice of optional question banks. This data has highlighted some new areas of focus, in particular around *Course Content and Structure* and *Intellectual Motivation*. **For example, 59.15% of Black students agreed that *The course has stimulated my interest in the field of student*, 15.95% lower than White students.** These gaps are not reflect across the sector, with Black students nationally responding 1.32% more positively on the *Intellectual Motivation* question bank than White students.

Much of the focus around Black Students within Access and Participation has been around the '[Black Attainment Gap](#)' - the gap between proportions of Black and White students achieving 1st class or 2.1. Over the previous 12 months there has been a growing consensus in the sector (including the Office for Students³) that the term 'Attainment Gap' places an undue focus on the students themselves as being at fault rather than the wider system. Therefore, the Guild will be adopting the term 'Black Awarding Gap' moving forwards, and strongly recommends that the University considers the same approach.

This report notes the significant progress that had been made in reducing the Awarding Gap to 12% for the 2019/20 academic year. The COVID-19 pandemic and the various challenges it presented meant that it is hard to compare the gap as it currently exists with the 'old normal'. **As we emerge from the pandemic and transition back into a version of "normal" education, there is a risk that the Awarding Gap returns to previous levels** - especially in light of some of the major gaps that are visible in the Black Student Experience data relating to learning, teaching and course content.

In the Student Voice Report 2020, it was recommended that the Guild's Black Voices Manifesto⁴ was implemented by the University. The manifesto recommends that UoB should begin a proactive process of decolonising the curriculum of every subject, and that this process should include meaningful contributions from Black Students and Student Representatives. This was based on the recommendations from Universities UK's *Closing the Gap Report*, which stated:

*"The design of the curriculum, its content, and the teaching and learning practices used to deliver it can have a significant impact on the way that students from different backgrounds and ethnicities respond to their course and lecturers and tutors"*⁵

We note the good work that has been commenced in some areas of the University, in particular the work that the Business School and the School of Education have started in this area in working towards systemic changes. We also note the **appetite that exists across the wider student body to engage with this work**, over the past 12 months numerous student-led events on these topics have been held across all Colleges. **During the height of the Black Lives Matter protests, Black medical students published an open letter calling for change in how their course was structured and delivered.** In October 2020 the Guild hosted a conference on decolonisation in October 2020 and attendees included 150 students from across the University. We recommend that this enthusiasm is productively channelled, through extending this work across the remainder of the University in every subject. While this project would be significant, **we view it as proportionate to the scale of the challenges the data presents.**

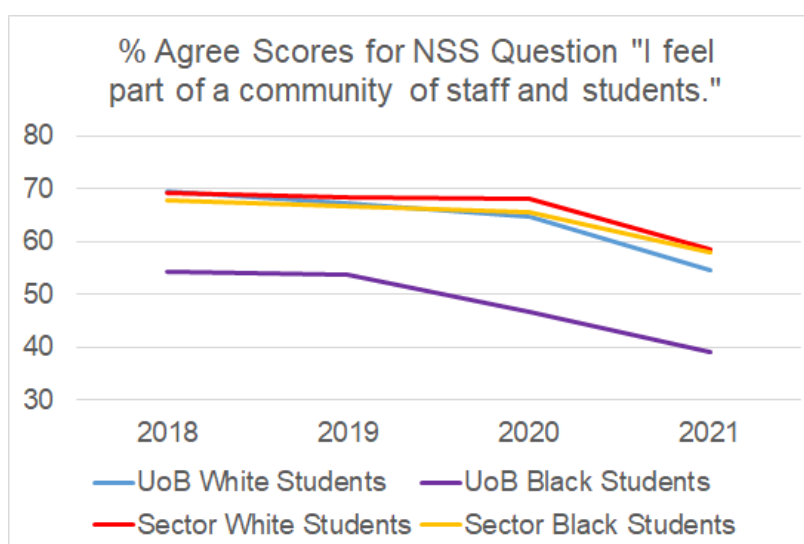
³ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/black-asian-and-minority-ethnic-students/>

⁴ <https://www.guildofstudents.com/blackvoices/#manifesto>

⁵ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/field/downloads/2021-07/bame-student-attainment.pdf>

b. Community and Belonging

A further area that was discussed in the Student Voice Report 2020 was community and belonging. Optional question banks relating to *Social Opportunities (B6)* and *Learning Community (B12)* have been removed this year, reducing the extent of the analysis that is now possible in this area. However, there are **still significant issues relating to the sense of belonging amongst Black students at UoB, which are not reflected in the wider sector.** Of particular concern is the question *I feel like part of a community of staff and students* – Graph 1 compares UoB to the Sector average over time:



Graph 1: UoB/Sector Average over time

In previous years, it was highlighted that social offer at UoB had considerable disparities between Black and White Students - while we no longer have the robust data from the NSS to monitor this, the Guild will be proceeding on the assumption that this remains the case as several previous years of data have evidenced a clear trend, and will aim to roll out peer-led racial inclusivity training for student groups using a similar model to the successful Not On anti-sexual harassment campaign.

In addition, we are also keen to work with the DPVC (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) and the Equality & Diversity Advisor for Students to **further investigate the overlap between race and socio-economic background in relation to student engagement with student activities and community events**, and are keen to identify recommendations to support increased participation and belonging, **including additional specific financial support and engagement support activities for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds to participate in student groups, sports and other extracurricular activities.**

c. Careers

Within the new *Careers* optional bank questions, Black students responded 5.07% less positively than White Students to these questions. The most significant gap is for the question *As a result of my course, I believe that I have improved my career prospects* which Black students responded to 17.62% less positively than White students. This is not a gap that exists in the wider sector. The question *Good advice is available for making career choices* is also of concern, while the gap between Black and White students at UoB is smaller at -3.78% - the sector as a whole has a positive gap, in which Black students responded 7.64% more positively. Some good work has already begun in this area: last year the Guild's Ethnic Minority

Students' Officer collaborated with Careers Network on a number of events and activities. Events such as these should become regular occurrences, and the Careers team should engage with Black Students to understand the root causes of these gaps.

Recommendations:

- The University formally adopt the term 'Awarding Gap' to explain the disparity in the rates of Black and White students being awarded 'good degrees'.
- The Guild continue the development and rollout of the 'Be The Change' anti-racism workshop pilot for Student Groups
- Each School should convene internal panels of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicity students to give feedback, in their own words, and to make recommendations on course content and delivery. These projects should be substantive and be led by paid students.
- The Guild, DPVC (Equality, Diversity & Inclusion) and the Equality & Diversity Advisor for Students to further investigate the overlap between race and socio-economic background in relation to student engagement with student activities and community events and develop a series of recommendations, including specific funding to support participation in extracurricular activities
- Careers Network engage with Black Students to understand the disparity in the Careers-related question bank.

ii. Disabled Students

The Student Voice Report 2020 included a specific section on the Disabled Student Experience for the first time. In particular, the Report noted major gaps in satisfaction for Disabled students in *Organisation & Management*, *Student Voice*, *Welfare* and *Workload* in the NSS data. We highlighted that there were **clear issues emerging in the data that required close attention, that the continuing pandemic was likely to exacerbate concerns for Disabled students and that the Guild would undertake further research to understand these emerging trends**. We note that despite best efforts, no significant reductions have been made to gaps – indeed, in many instances these gaps have increased. In fact while the above listed areas remain a significant concern, they are now joined by a number of new areas. As with last year, students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SLDs) have seen the most dramatic downward decline in student experience, however there are also a number of areas of concern for students with Other Disabilities.

In last year's Student Voice Report, the Guild committed to an in-depth research project into the experience of Disabled Students. The full findings of the 'Guild Disabled Students' Commission' (GDSC) will be published shortly, outlining our key recommendations. However, where findings are relevant to learning, teaching and assessment, preliminary data will be shared below.

a. Access Needs in Learning and Assessment

Learning and Assessment Access Needs are among the most fundamental requirements supporting Disabled Students to succeed in University life. **The Assessment and Feedback category in NSS 2021 saw responses on average 10.79% lower for students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SLDs)** than students with No Known Disabilities. The question *My course has challenged me to achieve my best work* has moved from having no significant gap to a gap of -5.45%. In both instances, the sector average data has gaps several times smaller.

| | The teaching on my course | 4. My course has challenged me to achieve my best work. | Assessment and feedback | 8. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance. | Academic support | 13. I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course. | 14. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course. | Organisation and management | Learning community | Student Voice | 25. It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on. | The students' union (association or guild) effectively represents students' academic interests. | B13 Intellectual Motivation | B13.3 The course has stimulated my enthusiasm for further learning. |
|---|---------------------------|---|-------------------------|---|------------------|--|---|-----------------------------|--------------------|---------------|---|---|-----------------------------|---|
| UoB SLDs | 74.07 | 66.67 | 44.44 | 43.7 | 57.16 | 53.33 | 49.24 | 47.16 | 57.41 | 50.12 | 32.59 | 40.15 | 58.97 | 50.77 |
| UoB SLDs/ No Known Disabilities Gap | -4.71 | -5.45 | -10.79 | -12.81 | -10.33 | -10.31 | -10.91 | -13.78 | -7.21 | -8.41 | -9.07 | -4.23 | -5.53 | -6.97 |
| UoB SLDs/No Known Disabilities Gap Movement | -5.76 | -8.52 | -6.64 | -5.31 | -9.92 | -10.96 | -10.1 | -8.84 | -7.84 | -4.1 | -5.24 | 1.93 | N/A | N/A |
| UoB /Sector SLDs Student Difference | -4.6 | -8.2 | -21.03 | -21.46 | -14.35 | -15.89 | -17.31 | -16.83 | -8.81 | -14.57 | -17.51 | -11.51 | -10.13 | -11.8 |
| Sector SLDs/No Known Disabilities Gap | -1.45 | -1.44 | -3.42 | -5.1 | -2.39 | -2.75 | -1.65 | -6.69 | -0.85 | -2.36 | -1.78 | -2.12 | 0.69 | -1.59 |

These issues often stem from how Disabled Students' access needs are accounted for, the process for application and how the adjustments they receive are implemented within their Schools and Departments. We note that the STARS project review of Reasonable Adjustment Plan (RAPs) is a positive step, as are the proposed changes to the My Additional Considerations systems. However, many Disabled Students report that the point of difficulty is not securing a RAP, but its full implementation.

Table 3: Guild Disabled Students' Commission responses to access needs in learning and assessment. (n=138)

| | Specific Learning Difficulties % Agree | Other Disabilities % Agree |
|--|---|-------------------------------|
| My access needs have been fairly accounted for in my learning | 21% | 35% |
| My access needs have been fairly accounted for in my assessments | 44% | 45% |

Disabled students have clear and significant concerns relating to how their access needs are accounted for in their Learning and Assessment, and Guild Advice case reviews demonstrate repeated requests for advice from Disabled students facing issues at local level with the full implementation of their RAP. This year, Guild Advice have supported a number of Disabled students who have had their RAPs discounted during online assessments, particularly where these have been scheduled for a 24 period and therefore badged as "inclusive by design". We were concerned to hear that, in some instances, students only found that their RAPs were not being implemented as they started the assessment, with no prior warning given.

These concerns express themselves in the new satisfaction gaps emerging between students with Specific Learning Difficulties and students with No Known Disabilities in the NSS is within the Academic Support category. For the question ***I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course, 15.89% fewer students with Specific Learning Difficulties agreed than the sector average*** despite UoB's scores being almost indistinguishable from the sector average last year.

These scores reflect the findings of the Guild Disabled Students' Commission (GDSC), where many students spoke of their particular frustration in trying to get help and advice from academic staff in their department and the conflicting information received from wellbeing and academic staff:

*"It feels like **the staff in my department feel like it's not their responsibility**"*

*"I asked for my RAP to have an academic explain the marking specification to me, **the Welfare officer thought that was totally un-exceptional [sic] but the academics refused.**"*

There is clear confusion for students about how their agreed RAP will be implemented at local level and significant concern when difficulties are faced. We recommend that the review of RAP processes and implementation clearly communicates the following expectations for students:

- Students meet in person or virtually with a Disability Advisor to agree a Reasonable Adjustment Plan

- The student is able to meet in-person or virtually with the School Wellbeing Tutor to agree how the Reasonable Adjustments will be implemented locally, including provision for assessment-specific adjustments
- There is a clear, simple and timely process for students to raise concerns about the implementation of their Reasonable Adjustment Plans, with a guaranteed turnaround time and the provision for a Disability Advisor or Guild Advice staff member to support the student in discussions with their School or Department

This review should consider Disabled Students as key stakeholders and involve active engagement with Disabled Students at each stage.

We further recommend that student-facing academic and Professional Services staff within schools have a higher level of literacy in accessible education in general, and Disabled Students should be provided with clearer signposting and communications regarding who they can talk to about their needs within their school.

b. Welfare

The NSS's Welfare questions have seen some of the most significant declines in recent years for Disabled Students. In NSS 2021, only 24.62% of students with Specific Learning Difficulties were satisfied that *There is sufficient provision of welfare and student services to meet my needs*, a 20.09% drop on 2020. UoB's score on this question has declined by more than a half in two years, whilst the sector average declined by less than a quarter – suggesting this dissatisfaction goes beyond Covid-19 related difficulties.

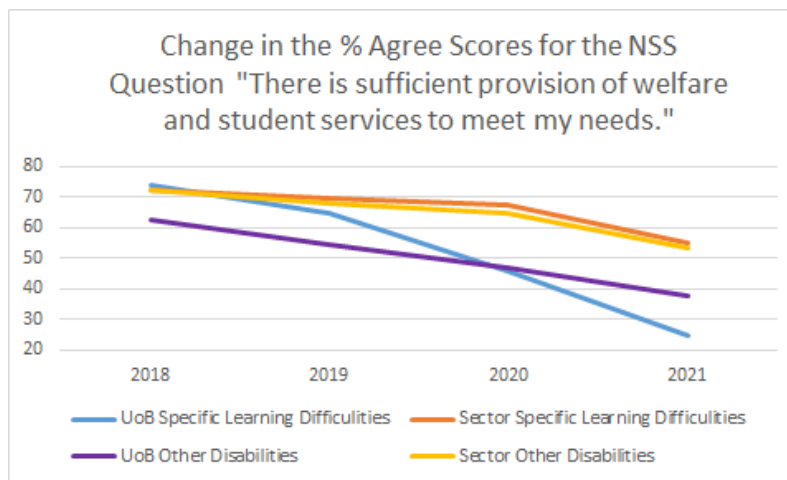


Figure 2: % Agree scores over time

One of the more concerning emerging trends from the Guild's Disabled Students' Commission is the perceived excessive use of Leaves of Absence. **Of those who had been offered a Leave of Absence, 57.2% disagreed that steps had been taken beforehand to try and support them to stay in their studies - leaving the students feeling as though the University has simply given up on trying to support them effectively.** In a GDSC focus group one student stated:

"They tried to manipulate me into taking a leave of absence or finishing with a reduced level of qualification."

Another said:

“I was told I should take a leave of absence....I was told while it was optional, if I didn’t take it there would be a board meeting to consider whether I was fit for final placement and that I would fail and be kicked off the course”

In the first case study, the student queried this push for a leave of absence and asked for a meeting with their Disability Advisor present. Once this meeting took place and the Advisor was in the room, they were reassured, and they were able to complete their course in full and graduate with a good mark.

While in some cases a Leave of Absence is the right option for a student, it is important that it is not seen as the only way forward or a ‘quick fix’ - especially as Disabled Students will often still need adjustments and support to re-adjust upon their return to study. Some who opted for a leave of absence told the GDSC about the difficulty they had re-adjusting when they returned - for example a student who took a leave of absence due to poor mental health said:

“I was not supported to transition back into University...Nobody has got in touch to check how I’m doing.”

As noted above, the Guild believes that the work to review Leave of Absence procedures is a positive step, and it is essential that Disabled students are seen as a key stakeholder in this process. In addition, there is a need for clearer guidance for academic staff on managing reasonable adjustments, along with clearer guidance on how to support students considering a leave of absence and how to support their transition back to study.

c. Student Voice & Feedback

For Disabled Students, ‘Student Voice’ means more than just how feedback about course content is responded to and often incorporates staff responses to their specific access needs and requests. This helps to explain the downwards trend in the *Student Voice* question bank satisfaction. As Graph 3 demonstrates, the divergence started in 2020 and has accelerated this academic year, as the impact of the pandemic has compounded dissatisfaction in this area:

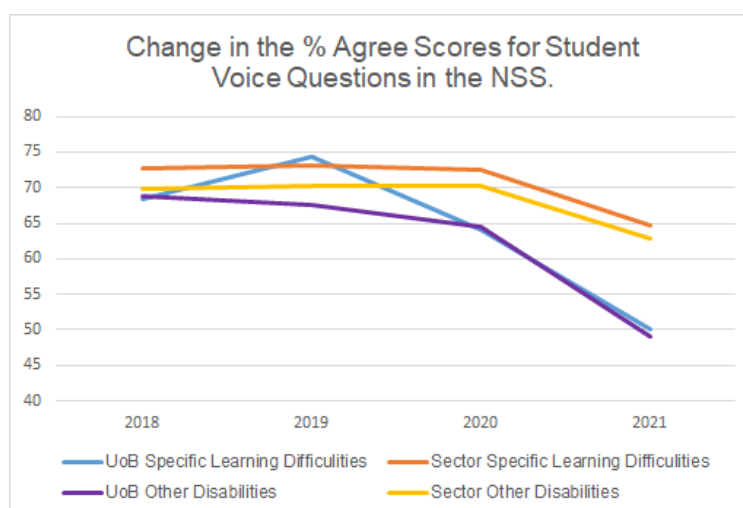


Figure 3: % Agree Scores for the Student Voice Questions over time

Only 32.59% of students with Specific Learning Difficulties and only 31.88% of students with Other Disabilities agreed that *It is clear how students’ feedback on the course has been acted upon.* Student comments note that Disabled students perceive that the University considered their feedback as less important than other students, often noting that Disabled

students had been requesting many of the adaptations quickly adopted during Covid-19 for years:

“If disabled people are struggling we won’t do anything, but when other people are struggling we’ll do all we can.”

As part of the GDSC, **only 28% of students with Specific Learning Difficulties and 42% of students with Other Disabilities agreed with the statement “I am confident that if I raised a concern about my access needs with my school or college they would respond appropriately”**. This frustration expressed itself this academic year around issues with Panopto subtitling, where Disabled students consistently reported the inaccuracy of automatically generated subtitles on lecture recordings – 56% GDSC respondents reported somewhat or very inaccurate subtitling, with only 2% reporting they were “very accurate”. Despite active lobbying by the Guild’s Disabled Students’ Officer and Student Reps throughout the year, no progress was made on improving subtitle accuracy.

d. Careers & Advice

The new Careers specific bank of questions provides a new and highly valuable set of data regarding how Disabled Students feel about their careers and the support they have received in this area. The primary area of concern for students with Specific Learning Difficulties relates to the advice on offer, as illustrated by table 4.

Table 4: UoB v Sector NSS Scores for Specific Learning Difficulties and students with No Known Disabilities

| | UoB Specific Learning Difficulties | UoB Difference from No Known Disabilities | Sector SLDs | Sector difference from No Known Disabilities |
|--|------------------------------------|---|-------------|--|
| Good advice is available for making career choices. | 40 | -19.15 | 62.95 | -1.11 |
| Good advice is available on further study opportunities. | 34.92 | -26.5 | 59.86 | -3.59 |

As Table 4 demonstrates, there are significant gaps between students with Specific Learning Difficulties and those with No Known Disabilities regarding the advice they receive relating to careers and further study. These gaps are minimal in the wider sector.

We recommend that the Careers team conduct a review into their offer for Disabled Students, learning from the good practice present elsewhere in the sector. For example, a number of universities provide dedicated extra support, resources, and signposting to Disabled Students relating to their career opportunities. We would also recommend that academic staff are given firmer guidance relating to how to support Disabled Students to consider further study.

e. The overall student experience for Disabled Students

This year has seen the most drastic changes in NSS scores for Disabled Students in recent years. The most notable is for **the question “I would recommend the University of Birmingham as a great place to study.”, which fell by 30% among students with Specific Learning Difficulties, and 20% by those with Other Disabilities to 53.85% and 58.68%**

respectively. This is the largest decline for any demographic group for any question and considerably lower than the 70.55% of students with No Known Disabilities who agreed with the statement.

A simple explanation for these declines would be that they have been driven by the difficult situations faced by Disabled Students during the Covid-19 pandemic and the dramatic changes to University life that this necessitated. However, it should be noted that many of these declines in satisfaction are specific to the University and not replicated across the wider sector.

It should also be noted that students, both in the NSS and the GDSC, were glowing in their praise about the central Disability team and their individual Disability Advisors, and this good practice should undoubtedly be recognised. However, there are clear and systemic issues across the institution in how student-facing staff are equipped to support disabled students that requires significant consideration and it is recommended that staff should be equipped to support disabled students to achieve their full potential during their time at UoB. This approach would be a significant shift in ways of working and will depend on significant time spent engaging directly with Disabled students. We are keen to work with the University, therefore, to develop a participation action research project, which supports Disabled Students to engage directly with University & Guild services to action meaningful co-created solutions.

Recommendations:

- The Guild and University should partner on a Disabled Students participation action research project, with agreed actions and progress reported via a Student Academic Engagement Committee.
- The review of Reasonable Adjustment Plans should consider Disabled Students as key stakeholders, and should include processes and guidelines for implementation at School / Departmental level, including a clear, simple and timely process for students to raise concerns about the implementation of their RAP.
- Disabled Students should have the right to their individual needs being considered with the support of Disability Advisors before their Reasonable Adjustments are not implemented at a course-level in the future.
- All student-facing staff should be given training and/or resources on the needs and rights of Disabled Students. This should include:
 - How to approach the implementation of Reasonable Adjustments and the relevant legal constraints
 - How and when to support them through a Leave of Absence
 - Providing advice for further study opportunities.
- The Careers Team should review their offer to disabled students, with a particular focus on students with Specific Learning Difficulties.

iii. General Access and Participation

The Guild appreciated the opportunity to work with relevant University colleagues and students to draft the APP Student Submission. It was clear from student feedback that there was a very strong feeling that staff based in the Outreach Team who provided dedicated access activities were effective, passionate and supportive.

However, as with issues discussed above in relation to Disabled students and Black students, when not dealing with specialist support staff, students were more likely to encounter barriers to support and participation at course level. For example, a student from a low income background told of their experience receiving an email during COVID-19 pandemic from her School which contained a list of circumstances that would not be considered acceptable “excuses” for extensions on deadlines. Among these were not having appropriate space to study at home and having a busy home environment. The student was left feeling that the staff in her School did not understand her needs or the impact her circumstances had on her ability to study, with impacts both on her wellbeing and her perception of place in the University community.

Specialist staff also noted that these examples outlined there were risks across the institution of slipping into a “deficit model”, which they worked hard to avoid. As the previous sections have illustrated, **good practices exists throughout the University, often in the form of the dedicated and talented staff who specialise in these fields.** However, given the scale of the University, the actions of a small cadre of specialists can become overwhelmed by wider trends if not effectively channelled.

Academic staff need to understand the importance of inclusive practice in support, teaching and assessment, and be equipped to apply this - which necessitates a programme of training to support them to undertake this practice well. **This approach should not be on an opt-in basis, as this risks attracting the ‘usual suspects’ who are already well practiced in these areas.** We are concerned that anything less than this will not meet the challenge of building an inclusive educational environment for 39,000 students from varying backgrounds and diverse needs.

Recommendations:

- That the APP’s approach to engaging with wider staff is strengthened, to equip all those who are in engage directly with students to adapt their practice to be more inclusive. In order for this to be achieved, Heads of School and Department should be accountable for its success in their respective areas.

3. Assessment and Feedback

Assessment and Feedback had featured frequently in Student Voice Reports and, in previous years, the Guild and University have worked collaboratively to develop, implement and review a number of positive interventions in this area, including a full review of the relevant Code of Practice in 2016/17, the development of a Guide to Feedback for Students in 2019 and the introduction of the Assessment Cover sheet.

Over the last 12 months, Schools have worked quickly to adapt and re-develop a range of online assessments in light of Covid-19 and, for some students, this was clearly a positive development:

The structure of assessments during COVID have been very beneficial. Having 24-hour open-book exams means more emphasis is on understanding and applying knowledge rather than memorising knowledge. Lecture support sessions have been very useful in preparing for assessments and understanding lecture content.

I also really like the assessment structure and how it is not too exam heavy - I feel history really lends itself to essays and extended coursework and I enjoyed these aspects of work more rather than a 3-hour memory test

The Student Evaluation of Learning and Teaching (SELT) 2021 data also points to a good level of satisfaction with the range of assessment options available across all 5 Colleges, ranging from 58 - 88% at Undergraduate level. The Guild is supportive of plans to retain inclusive online assessments, and would encourage Schools and Departments to reflect on opportunities to implement and expand provision of online assessments wherever possible.

It should also be noted that, over the course of the last year, positive developments have also been undertaken in the structures underpinning student engagement with assessments – in particular, **the introduction of self-certification and the development of the online “My Additional Considerations” portal offer clear benefits for students.** Throughout this project, clear engagement and consultation was undertaken with the Education Officer and relevant Guild departments, and a similar approach is strongly encouraged for the current review of Reasonable Adjustment Plans, as noted above. **We also welcome proposals to allow “re-sits” in the final stage of a degree, and recommend that this change – as with “My Additional Considerations” – is clearly communicated by the University to all students as improvements resulting from student feedback and work undertaken in partnership with the Guild.**

a. Feedback Timeliness and Quality

Across the institution at Undergraduate level, NSS 2021 demonstrates that Assessment and Feedback remains a “major weakness”⁶, with overall satisfaction for this section dropping by -10.38% to 54.43%, a -28.58% gap from the Top Quartile. Though satisfaction scores have, on average, dropped slightly across the sector in this area - likely as a result of the challenges of the global pandemic - **UoB is now lagging behind the sector by nearly 15% on questions covering clear marking criteria, timely feedback and receiving helpful comments on submitted work.** Whilst PGTs are more positive in general about assessments, PTES 2021 also noted student dissatisfaction with feedback timeliness and quality. In particular, “Postgraduates complained about delays to receiving feedback and criticised feedback for being unhelpful, lacking detail, and not being constructive. Some

⁶ UEC NSS 2020 Paper

comments also added that feedback from different members of staff had seemed contradictory and that some had conflicted with information in the module/course handbook.”⁷

Noting the significant drops in satisfaction on Question 10 (*Feedback on my work has been timely*) and Question 11 (*I have received helpful comments on my work*) and NSS free text comments in this area, there is clear student dissatisfaction with the quality of feedback and its timeliness. Comments highlight that feedback is vague, brief and does not contain specific advice on improvement. Though we note the significant challenges faced by staff this year and the additional pressures on workload in 2021/22 as a result of increasing student numbers, the Guild believes that it is key that the University re-communicates clearly to staff expectations that all written feedback includes clear and specific recommendations for the student to improve on the next assignment.

We also note the new time pressures created by the January assessment period and the need for students to receive useful and timely feedback on formative assessments before approaching summative assessments, to support an “Assessment for Learning” approach.⁸ This is particularly crucial for the incoming cohort of Undergraduates, who may not have sat formal examinations for the last two academic years. More widely, we recommend that the University undertake a formal institutional review considering assessment methodologies, assessment for learning, inclusive assessment, staff workload and reduction of administrative burden to support innovation. It is key that student voices are at the heart of this review, and that opportunities for meaningful student engagement and co-design are explored across all Colleges. This review should also consider the adoption of a “Patchwork Assessment” model where appropriate as outlined by the Higher Education Academy.⁹ We also note the secondary benefits of the Patchwork Assessment model in developing more inclusive forms of assessment.

The Guild is keen to support this work by refreshing the student-facing Guide to Feedback, to ensure that information about what feedback is and how it can be proactively utilised to improve understanding and performance is easily accessible to students. We will also deliver key academic advice informational campaigns around exam irregularities, additional circumstances and academic appeals processes, noting our ability to provide independent academic advice to students.

b. Communication and Organisation

Positive student comments in this area note clear timetables for deadlines, clarity around assessment and assignment briefings, consistency in assessment approaches across modules and timely feedback that allows actionable improvements ahead of the next assignment. However, perennial themes around communication, organisation and clarity of information can be found across student comments in the key student surveys this year in relation to Assessment & Feedback:

I feel the assessment criteria is very secretive and that I am always entering exams with a slight handicap. I would appreciate more information regarding what I should be investing my time into learning, especially as rumours circulate throughout the cohort and it feels like some students are at more of an advantage than others. (NSS 2021)

Overall, there was too much bunching up of assignments as many were pushed back weeks and therefore clashed. Furthermore, the assignment q&a sessions were also too late, being only a week

⁷ PTES 2021 Paper, Graduate Taught Board

⁸ <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/teaching-and-learning/transforming-assessment>

⁹ https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.creode.advancehe-document-manager/documents/hea/private/resources/hea_patchwork_assessment_practice_guide_1568037355.pdf

before the deadline in most cases and although they were useful, this continued the trend of me having to wait for these sessions before I feel comfortable to complete my assignment etc. (SELT 2021)

Lecturers have been unclear throughout the degree in terms of exams, mark schemes and deadlines...things being unclear has been the story of my degree, and it has not gotten better. (NSS 2021)

Assignment briefs are just that, brief. They are rushed, rarely cover the exact details of what is expected, and are often revised close to assignment deadlines with little to no warning. Feedback is often in the form of a letter grade with undefined and vague boundaries with a small sentence to say what could be improved. (NSS 2021)

These comments also match wider concerns arising from the NSS 2021 around course organisation and management, where the University is ranked bottom of the Russell Group across the core question bank (60% student satisfaction). Though PTES scores in this area are generally higher (76%), there are wide disparities between subject areas across questions on prompt feedback and course organisation and free-text comments highlighted disorganisation and poor communication regarding timetable changes, exam arrangements and assessment requirements.¹⁰

The Guild appreciates that communication and organisation was extremely difficult this year, particularly in light of the ongoing changes around Covid restrictions, issues with timetabling software and the impact of the first year of NATY implementation. Looking forward, we also note the significant increase in student numbers this academic year, and the additional challenges that this is likely to place on staff resource and time, and the further pressure on communications and forward planning. However, there is a clear & pressing need for improved, centralised and rationalised communication to students about assessment, feedback and course organisation, across the University and at all levels of study. We note that ProFF is intended to make useful gains in this area, and we are keen to ensure that student voices remain at the heart of these plans – particularly in relationship to improved optionality, course transfer and improved joint course experience.

We wish to see consistency across Colleges in the levels of transparency around assessment processes and practices, including clear information about expected feedback timelines, assessment & exam rubrics, moderation processes, academic integrity and appeals. This should be available clearly online and students of all years should receive transparent information annually in weekly group tutorial meetings, where there is space to answer questions about School / Department practices and clarify understanding. In addition, a College Forum focussed on Assessment & Feedback should be held annually to ensure student feedback and input into approaches at a local level. Assessment deadlines should also be audited at School / Department level for both Undergraduates and Taught Postgraduates to ensure that “clumping” of deadlines is avoided and that students are supported to succeed via an assessment burden that is mindful of workload spread.

c. Online Assessments, Collusion and Plagiarism

The Guild is aware that concerns were raised across the University, particularly in EPS & LES, regarding online assessments and a significant increase in collusion and plagiarism, principally around group chat discussions, “copy and paste” answers and increased use of essay mills. These concerns align with the considerable discussion that has taken place across the sector around online assessment and essay mills.¹¹

¹⁰ PTES 2021 Paper, Graduate Taught Board

¹¹ See, for example, <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/banning-essay-mills-its-time-to-act/>

This concern was further highlighted by increased numbers of students requesting support via Guild Advice with plagiarism and collusion issues, with an 80% increase in casework in this area and particular spikes in support requests from students in EPS and CAL. Students approaching Guild Advice demonstrated confusion around how to apply academic integrity principles to online assessments, how to approach “open book” examinations and a lack of understanding around what online exam irregularities entailed.

Although some of these students will be subject to formal integrity and misconduct proceedings, we are keen to ensure that approaches to tackling this issue are not solely punitive. As noted above, clear assessment criteria, well-spaced assessment deadlines and easily available information about additional circumstances processes all support students to succeed in assessments. We also recommend that the Guild and the University partner to create a “Guide to Online Assessments”, similar to the Guide to Feedback, to support all UG and PGT students. In addition, we will also communicate a set of Assessment, Additional Circumstances, Exam Irregularities & Misconduct, and Appeals guides via Guild Advice. We would appreciate the support of the newly appointed Student Academic Experience Interns in communicating this support within Colleges, and are keen to provide the Interns and Personal Academic Tutors with clear information on our support and referrals processes.

Recommendations:

- The introduction of “My Additional Considerations” and final stage re-sits should be clearly communicated to students by the University as arising from student feedback, and the role of the Guild and Student Reps in these developments should be clearly noted.
- Student engagement is undertaken as part of the ProFF project plan, particularly in relationship to improved optionality, course transfer and improved joint course experience.
- The University should undertake a formal institutional review into Assessment Design, adopting a “Patchwork Assessment” model where appropriate.
- Clearer information about timelines, assessment & exam rubrics, moderation processes, academic integrity and appeals should be available online for all students at School level, and refresher information should be discussed in group tutorial meetings across each year group
- Each College should discuss Assessment and Feedback annually as part of a College Forum
- Assessment deadlines should be audited at School / Department level for both Undergraduates and Taught Postgraduates to ensure that “clumping” of deadlines is avoided
- The Guild and the Director of Student Experience should collaborate to refresh the student Guide to Feedback and should develop a new Guide to Online Assessment
- The Guild to deliver key academic advice informational campaigns around exam irregularities, additional circumstances and academic appeals processes
- The Guild to provide training materials to personal tutors and Student Academic Experience Interns around the academic advice support and referrals process via Guild Advice

4. Postgraduate Taught Students: Academic Community

As noted above, following the recent changes within the Guild and to the leadership of the Graduate School, the Guild and the Postgraduate Officer are working hard to develop and strengthen our positive relationships with the Graduate School to the benefit of the Postgraduate Community.

We recognise that there is much positive work being undertaken via the Graduate School and relevant postgraduate-focussed committees, and welcome the inclusion of the Postgraduate Officer, postgraduate Student Representatives and relevant Guild staff within these meetings. We also note the positive work undertaken by postgraduate focussed colleagues, including Student Experience Officers and other professional services staff at School and College-level.

The Postgraduate Officer and the Dean of Postgraduates have agreed a number of priorities for the coming academic year, including postgraduate wellbeing and the improvements to Student Voice activity for postgraduates noted above, which will be actioned via the relevant University committees and working groups. The Student Voice Report does not seek to replicate or duplicate this work.

We note, however, that PTES 2021 saw a number of drops in satisfaction in the Learning Community question bank, with particular reductions in satisfaction around *I have been able to explore academic interests with other students* and *I feel part of an academic community in my College or University*. Undoubtedly, this drop is a result of the impact of Covid-19 and necessary moves to online delivery at PGT level – though it should be noted that satisfaction remained higher in CoSS and there may be positive case studies and practice to share from the Schools here.

The Guild was pleased to see that the Graduate School has identified this area as an action for 2021/22, and is keen to support work to develop a sense of community amongst PGT students, both academic and socially. We note that the Student Intern team have been identified as an area of support here – as above, we are keen to ensure that this team builds positive relationships with Guild Officers and staff, with effective signposting to existing Guild social activities, support and societies for postgraduate students. In addition, the Postgraduate Officer is keen to understand the breadth of academic community activities undertaken by Schools and to work to deliver complimentary activities with the Guild this year to allow cross-College connections between Postgraduate Taught students.

Recommendations:

- The Postgraduate Officer and the Dean of Postgraduates continue to collaborate on agreed priorities via the appropriate forum, with particular focus on the Student Voice, Postgraduate Wellbeing and Academic Community
- To work with the Student Intern team to signpost to existing Guild social activities, support services and societies for postgraduate students.