

UEA Student Experience



2010



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An Overview of the Union of UEA Students 2010-11

Written by the Academic Officer

Mission, Vision & Values

The Union of UEA Students' mission, vision and values outline our principle purpose. It is with these in mind that we have produced this annual Student Experience Report.

Mission:

1. To create positive change in matters relating to the education of UEA students by effectively representing their collective views.
2. To provide a range of high-quality, member-led services which embrace the needs of all UEA students.

Values:

1. Democracy – We are the legitimate voice of UEA students. Our policies and priorities are member-led.
2. Collectivism – Students are stronger when they organise together locally, nationally and internationally. Unity is our strength.
3. Empowerment – We support and empower our members to make change.
4. Equality – We believe that all students deserve equal rights and opportunities. As such, we campaign to challenge discrimination and we promote equality in our organisation and beyond.
5. Sustainability – We are not just here for the students of today, but also for the students of tomorrow. We are financially and environmentally sustainable.
6. Quality – Everything we do, we do well.

Vision:

By 2012:

- A. We will be universally acknowledged as the expert voice for UEA students.
- B. Our membership will know what their Union does and how they can change it.
- C. We will empower our activists and volunteers to make change in their communities.
- D. The way in which we make our decisions and the services we provide will be responsive to the changing needs of our membership and will be accessible to them all.
- E. We will be an exemplar low-carbon Union.



Introduction

Writing this, the Student Experience Report 2010, has been challenging but extremely rewarding. It gathers together the opinions of our members from a wide range of sources, and presents to the University an overview of what students would like from their time at UEA. The Union hopes that the University will act upon our recommendations which come directly from students, in order to achieve their aim of 'providing a student experience that is second to none in the UK'¹, as laid down in the Corporate Plan.

The report has been written to inform university staff about the issues students perceive to have a direct impact on their student experience. From getting feedback on exams to parking on campus, there are a range of issues which affect the experience that a student has at university. Addressing the issues raised in this report can only improve the overall satisfaction level of students, which will be reflected in future National Student Surveys. It is therefore key to ensuring that UEA retains its place in the top five universities for student satisfaction.

It is clear from the data in the National Student Survey and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey, as well as individual student comments, that the standard of education and level of student experience at this University is extremely good. Indeed, one comment from the National Student Survey 2009 sums up the general feeling:

"Great lecturers, great campus, great course flexibility. Nice one."

Yet, there are always opportunities for improvement, and where we believe that the University could do even better we have presented our recommendations. Student officers and representatives look forward to working in partnership with the University to build on these improvements throughout the next year. The Union hopes that our recommendations will be acted upon, and that the actions that the University takes to address these issues be reported back to the Student Experience Committee.

Finally, I would like to thank all members of staff around the University who work with student officers and student representatives, as they seek to shape their education and the community around them.

Yours in unity,
Rachel Handforth
Academic Officer 2010
Union of UEA Students



¹ University of East Anglia Corporate Plan, 2008-12

Methodology

The UEA Student Experience Report has been compiled and edited by the Academic Officer of the Union of UEA Students (UUEAS). The Academic Officer was supported by the Community and Student Rights Officer, Communications Officer and Finance Officer of the Union. It uses a variety of figures which relate specifically to UEA students, with comparisons to national data where relevant and useful.

The author makes a set of recommendations at the end of each section that are summarised on pages 7-9.

A variety of sources have been used in the report; these include student surveys, individual responses and minutes of meetings. These sources have then been woven together to inform and support the conclusions of this document.

Source	Year	Population	Number of Respondents	Type of Data	Abbreviation
National Student Survey	2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010	Final Year Undergraduates	2007-1500 2008-1590 2009-1670 2010- 1774	Quantitative and Qualitative	NSS
Postgraduate Research Experience Survey	2008 and 2009	Postgraduate Research Students	2008- 224 2009- 332	Quantitative	PRES
Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey	2009 and 2010	Postgraduate Taught Students	2009- 256 2010- 593	Quantitative and Qualitative	PTES
UUEAS Annual Student Survey	2010	All Students	1684	Quantitative and Qualitative	n/a
UUEAS Students at Work	2009	All Students	647	Quantitative and Qualitative	UUEAS WS Survey
Staff Student Liaison Committee Minutes	2008-10	UEA Student Representatives	n/a	Qualitative	SSLC

Additional qualitative data was gathered from direct emails or comments to student officers.

Recommended Actions

Academic Issues

The Union of UEA Students recommends that the University:

1.1 Fees and Funding

- i) Publically oppose tuition fees for Home and EU undergraduate students, and give support for a fairer and more sustainable Higher Education funding model
- ii) Increase the funds available for bursaries, and provide more information about the funding that it offers to students, particularly to those studying abroad.

1.2 Graduate Employability

- i) Continue to help prepare graduates for their career beyond university.
- ii) Embed careers skills training into all courses.
- iii) Create opportunities for students to make connections in relevant industries and professions, with particular emphasis on humanities subjects.

1.3 Students at Work

Closely monitor the impact of paid employment during term time on students, and pay particular attention to enhancements that support working students like the earlier release of timetables, staggered assessments and an end to Saturday exams.

2.1 Teaching and Supervision

- i) Appoint a senior member of the academic division to take responsibility for students studying joint honours degrees.
- ii) More effectively organise information regarding interdisciplinary courses.
- iii) Embed study skills into course content.
- iv) Improve staff student ratios to improve contact time and academic support.

2.2 Learner Voice

Continue to work in partnership with the Union to enable students to shape their own education. A culture of effective student representation should be developed in Schools and Faculties from induction. Students should be encouraged to voice problems and Staff Student Liaison Committees should aim to create positive change.

2.3 Promptness and Quality of Feedback

- i) Ensure that modules without significant projects and dissertations meet the stated goal of a 20 working day period for the return of detailed feedback to students. However, the prompt return of coursework should not be at the expense of detailed and useful feedback.
- ii) Examine the disparity between schools on the perceived usefulness of feedback to see if best practice can be shared to improve results for NSS.

2.4 Feedback on Examinations

Introduce appropriate feedback for all pieces of assessment including exams, and move towards embedding formative assessment in all courses as previously recommended by the Union.

2.5 Marking Criteria

- i) Publish clear and concise marking criteria for each piece of assessment. The mark that a student receives should always be clearly related to these criteria.
- ii) Investigate the reasons for students with specific learning difficulties being less satisfied with the fairness of marking, and if necessary better explain the purpose and use of the sticker system.

2.6 Standard Agreement for Dissertations

Continue to encourage the adoption of the standard agreement between students and supervisors on all taught postgraduate dissertation modules, and across all four Faculties. It should also monitor its impact on postgraduate student satisfaction in future postgraduate surveys.

2.7 Additional Course Costs

Give feedback to the Union's Academic Officer about the actions being undertaken from the recommendations that the Union made last academic year about additional course costs.

2.8 Provision of Timetables and Other Information

Ensure that timetables, reading lists and placement information are published as early as reasonably possible and in an accessible way.

2.9 Library and Learning Resources

Continue to expand and enhance the electronic provision of key books and journals wherever it can. A move to extend opening hours outside of the standard 12 week semester could be considered. The library should continue to work with Schools, in particular those in the Faculty of Health.

Welfare Issues

The Union of UEA Students recommends that the University:

3.1 Community Strategy

Create a far-reaching, resourced and sustainable Community Strategy in partnership with the Union. This strategy should include such themes as promoting neighbourliness and safety.

3.2 Transport

Continue to work with local bus providers to make the case for a reliable, reasonably priced bus service, and ensure that that the new Park and Ride service be as cost and time efficient to student users as is reasonably possible.



3.3 Student Support Services

Continue to invest in maximising student potential through its support services, and recognise these services as being integral to the student experience.

3.4 UEA London

Increase block-grant funding to the Union, in order to facilitate the employment of a part-time Advice & Representation worker at the University's London Study Centre, and that the University and Union review how the Union can work best for London students.

Table A - National Student Survey 2010 (Percentage in agreement with “overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course”)	
UK % Agree 2010	90
UK % Agree 2009	90
Sector wide % agree 2010	82
EU (excl UK) % agree 2010	87
EU (excl UK) % agree 2009	85
EU (excl UK) Sector-wide % agree 2010	81
Non-EU % Agree 2010	88
Non-EU % Agree 2009	93
Non-EU Sector-wide % Agree 2010	83

- The Academic Officer comments:
- ‘The future of higher education funding is extremely worrying. The possibility that students may have to pay up to £9000 for their education is an awful prospect, and UEA students will expect more from their student experience as a result. Our Students’ Union will be joining the National Union of Students and University and College Union to demonstrate against the proposed cuts to higher education and the rise in fees in London in November.’

In terms of funding and support for those who will struggle to fund their time at university, there is a comprehensive system of bursaries available at UEA. However, even under the current system, there are students who still feel they could be better supported.

Students commented in this year’s National Student Survey:

“[There is] not enough support for students who wish to carry on doing MAs, who although have the ability, do not have the funding. Students who wish to continue in a career in academia need more support.”

(HIS NSS 2010)

‘I discovered that it is almost impossible to live entirely on one’s student loan.’

(PSI NSS 2010)

This will only continue to be the case under a system of higher tuition fees. Students will feel financial pressures to an even greater extent and it is likely that they will have to either depend more on bursaries, or take on part-time work to supplement their loans, or both.

As mentioned in the Union’s Student Experience Report of 2009, postgraduate students are not content with the financial support they receive either. Nearly half of students surveyed in PRES 2009 suggested that the financing of a research degree places a strain on their personal finances and less than half of students think that funding is “appropriate”. Perhaps more could be done to inform potential postgraduate students of any bursaries that may be available to them, and to look at expanding the system of financial support for postgraduates where possible.

Table B PRES 2009 – Satisfaction	UEA figures 2009	UEA figures 2008	National figures 2009	National figures 2008
14.c The financing of my research degree programme places a strain on my personal finances.	46%	48%	51%	50%
3.c There is appropriate financial support for research activities	48%	49%	52%	51%

‘I am a postgraduate. I did not take out any student loans during my undergraduate degree. However, when I applied for this masters degree I thought that I would be able to get a student loan to help me pay for it. If I had known that postgraduates cannot get student loans I would not have applied for the degree, because I now have to have 2 jobs to help pay for it. These jobs make it very difficult for me to keep up with the coursework, and as a result I am not getting good grades or getting as much from the degree as I could.’

(UUEAS WS SURVEY, 2009)

‘As I spend the majority of time away from the university and have limited usage of the university and its facilities I feel the tuition fees are very high, compared to pupils who spend every day at the university.’

(EDU PTES 2010)

Furthermore, there are issues around funding for students who work or study abroad as part of their degree. This became clear from the Union’s Annual Student Survey 2010:

‘There is no advice given to students applying for courses which require a year abroad how much this will cost or how to raise the money to afford it if parents are unwilling or unable to cover it.’

(AMS 2010)

‘I feel I wasn’t properly informed of how much a year abroad would cost when I chose my degree course. Other information about finance was provided and I found this misleading as it turned out I couldn’t afford my year abroad’.

(ENV 2010)

‘The compulsory study abroad programmes are incredibly expensive! I have had to contribute a great deal of my own money to fund my year in America because student loans and grant don’t manage to cover it. Books are especially expensive in America compared to England. I think costs should be highlighted to students who enrol on a course with compulsory year abroad as soon as they apply to take the degree, to give plenty of warning and awareness.’ (FTV 2010)

The Academic Officer comments:
'The University should make clear information about the necessary costs that students on studying abroad or in industry will incur. There ought to be more information and advice available in induction materials for courses which require or give the option of years abroad, so that students are well informed before they make their decision on which course to take.'

Recommendation 1.1

- i) For the University to publically oppose tuition fees for Home and EU undergraduate students, and give support for a fairer and more sustainable Higher Education funding model.
- ii) That the University increase the funds available for bursaries, and provide more information about the funding that it offers to students, particularly to those studying abroad.

1.2 Graduate Employability

It is becoming difficult for graduates to find full-time employment at the level they might expect. Graduate unemployment has now risen to its highest level in 17 years; 8.9 percent of the graduate class of 2009 were found to be out of work in January 2010, the highest unemployment level since 1993³.

The jobs market has shrunk whilst the competition for graduate level employment is ever-increasing. It is important that the University does all it can to help students become as employable as possible, and to support them whilst they try to enter employment.

There have already been some positive steps towards achieving this aim. The University has an employability 'job shop' on campus which helps students to find work. There is also an Evolve programme to stimulate graduate internships, and a Director of Work Experience has recently been employed. These measures, along with the university's creation of an employability strategy will hopefully increase support for students who are attempting to enter graduate employment.

The prospective earnings of graduates are dependent upon the discipline they study. The average salary of a student who studies a humanities subject versus that of a business studies graduate are entirely different as the data in Table C indicates:

³Report on BBC News Website, 2nd November 2010

⁴<http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk> (Source: HESA 2006/07)

Table C Expected earnings for graduates in 2010 by degree ⁴ [selected] (Mean Salaries of Full-time, First Degree Leavers entering Employment)	
Medicine	£28,897
Maths	£22,882
Physics & Astronomy	£22,247
Computer sciences	£21,714
Business studies	£21,071
Accounting & Finance	£20,586
Geography and Environmental sciences	£19,545
Subjects allied to medicine	£19,418
Theology & Religious Studies	£19,141
History of Art, Architecture and Design	£18,975
English	£18,484
Linguistics	£17,681
Music	£17,017

Arts and humanities courses across the country are severely under threat as the government targets funding towards subjects such as the sciences and maths, and significantly reduces funding for humanities subjects. There is a real danger that traditional humanities subjects will become less widely available across the country due to a lack of funding.

If UEA can demonstrate higher average earnings for humanities graduates it can continue to attract students to these areas of study. Whilst the University provides an excellent service for students in terms of the Careers Centre, additional careers skills training should also be incorporated into all courses. Students should be actively encouraged to think about their employability from their first year at university in order to thoroughly prepare them for any future career.

Indeed, an AMS student commented in this year's National Student Survey:

'I don't feel any closer to a career than when I started.'

Furthermore, a student in HIS added:

'Unlike other universities and indeed some other courses at UEA there is not much focus on 'employability', or the development of personal skills.'

(NSS 2010)

Recommendation 1.2

- i) For the University to continue to help prepare graduates for their career beyond university.
- ii) To embed careers skills training into all courses.
- iii) To create opportunities for students to make connections in relevant industries and professions, with particular emphasis on humanities subjects.

1.3 Students at Work

Another consequence of the rise in tuition fees will be a rise in the number of students who have to work in order to finance their studies. Many students already do so in order to be financially solvent. The Union's Students at Work survey in 2009 found that 65% of students work alongside their studies. The comments made in this survey indicate that students already feel that their part-time work negatively affects their studies:

'If I didn't have to work I wouldn't, because I know that it definitely has a negative impact on my studies and university experience. However as fees are so high I have no choice.'

(UUEAS WS SURVEY 2009)

• The Academic Officer comments:

- 'The University could do more to support students who work by communicating information such as placement details and timetables to students as early as possible.
- The work of the Employability job shop on campus is valuable and this needs to be extended and built upon.'

'Just as I have found that employers do not seem to be understanding of the problems that students face, nor do university staff seem to be understanding of the problems that workers face.'

(UUEAS WS SURVEY 2009)

Moreover, students who have irregular timetables, including postgraduates and students in the Faculty of Health can be disadvantaged if they work part time, as this postgraduate student states:

'The course structure is fragmented and we never have a set weekly regime. Personally I would find it much better if we had certain days at University and certain days off as I am still working alongside my degree and cannot financially leave work I find the timetable irregularities a huge difficulty especially when I have to travel back to my home town 45 miles away after lectures in order to get to work to complete my shifts for the week. If we had set days off I could work around this much better. Often I am required to travel the 90 mile round trip for a one hour lecture which I feel is inconvenient and very expensive.'

(AHP PTES 2010)

• Recommendation 1.3

- For the University to closely monitor the impact of paid employment during term time on students, and pay particular attention to enhancements that support working students like the earlier release of timetables, staggered assessments and an end to Saturday exams.

Teaching & Academic Support

2.1 Teaching and Supervision

The quality and standard of teaching at UEA is very high, as demonstrated by the National Student Survey results of the last five years. UEA has never scored below 88%. Since 2009, satisfaction with teaching has been at 90% which indicates a high level of satisfaction with the education students receive, as indicated in Table D:

% satisfaction with the teaching on my course	UEA	HEIs	Top Quartile of HEIs
1 Staff are good at explaining things.	93	87	93
2 Staff have made the subject interesting	86	80	84
3 Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching.	91	84	88
4 The course is intellectually stimulating.	90	83	90

However, there are some areas where improvements can be made. In the NSS 2010, there were four main issues students raised in reference to the teaching they received. These were:

- ⇒ Difficulties with the structure of their course
- ⇒ Amount of module choice they have
- ⇒ Amount of contact time they get
- ⇒ The level of academic support they receive

Some students commented that the way their degree was structured meant that it was difficult for them to study effectively, as these students reflect:

'There were too many exams in the summer. The course could have put some after Christmas; instead we had 6 exams during the summer, half of which we had not studied since before Christmas. There was also an over complicated process of module selection.'
(HIS, NSS 2010)

'Some lecturers assume knowledge from previous modules that I had not taken and were not compulsory for their module.'
(BIO NSS 2010)

Other students felt that their course structure didn't allow enough module choice:

'As a Joint Honours student, I didn't really feel involved in either school. I was not considered as a student of the school in one of my subjects and therefore was put to the back of the

queue when it came to choosing modules, this meant that I missed out on a lot of what I wanted to study and often ended up with my third choice which I wasn't really interested in.'
(PHI NSS 2010)

Yet, the University states in its Corporate Plan that it values 'academic freedom' and that inter-disciplinarity is one of its 'founding themes'. There are a variety of other comments which have been raised in National Student Surveys which raise concerns from students on joint honours programmes:

'Doing a combined degree (joint honours) meant that I fell between schools and was completely forgotten about. Staff were generally unwilling to help, especially in the first weeks when I was new to the area [and] completely lost.'
(ENV NSS 2007)

'The fact that I am able to select units from such a vast range across a minimum of two schools... means that sometimes 'basic' concepts that others covered in first year I have little or no knowledge of. I don't think the ability for choosing diverse units should be taken away but perhaps more... assumed knowledge could be included in unit outlines or a brief introductory pack. Poor communication between schools and faculties has been a hindrance at times.'
(PSI NSS 2007)

'Studying for joint honours... brought to light a lack of communication between schools, which caused a few problems such as differing expectations and deadline pile-ups. Also, the two subjects did not relate to each other until the final year, which was rather discouraging in the second year. Things felt a bit too fragmented.'
(PHI NSS 2009)

It is clear that students who study joint honours programmes have specific issues which need to be addressed. The University's good reputation for inter-disciplinary learning means that efforts should be made at School and Faculty levels to ensure that courses which span more than one subject are as effectively organised as possible. There should be a more concerted effort to look at the design of joint honours degrees so that the multiple subjects are linked as closely as possible.

The issue of contact hours is particularly keenly felt in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, where there tends to be fewer hours of teaching than in other Faculties.

One student comments:

'As someone who learns through discussion, I find just 3 hours teaching a week in final year a let down, considering the tuition fees I pay. Simply reading in a library does not help me learn, and I feel more time in class discussion would benefit me much more.'
(HIS NSS 2009)

This might well become more of an issue for students in the light of the rise in tuition fees. The number of contact hours that a course contains could be a deciding factor for potential students when they choose a university, as it will be seen as more teaching for the money students will have to pay. This may be an issue the University will look to address when the government makes its decision on the level of tuition fees from 2012. In the NSS 2010, there were also a variety of comments about the level of academic

support and study skills guidance that students receive:

'I found it very difficult to cope with the new skills demanded of me by my course. There should be sessions available to help guide first years towards good study habits and methods of undertaking research. This is doubly important for international students, as they may be less familiar with the type of study skills [required].'

(PSI NSS 2010)

This comment suggests that the study skills workshops offered by the Learning Enhancement Team, along with the support of academic advisors in Schools, are not being used to their full effect. The University could utilise these resources to a much greater extent by integrating them into course materials so that students are more aware of them.

Academic Support

The system of academic support for students through their advisors could be improved upon. The experience that students have with their advisors varies widely across Schools and Faculties. Indeed, one student from LAW comments:

'Although I met my advisor for all appointments, I found I was given little advice, especially surrounding module choices for the final year, and also my advisor was changed in my final semester, which I found slightly distressing since it was at a crucial point in my studies. I also learnt that it would be my new advisor, not my previous one, who would write my reference. Also, it seemed from my meetings that unless I was considering further study, my advisor didn't really seem able or even interested in assisting me to explore different career choices.'

(LAW NSS 2010)

Whereas, in other Schools, students seem to have had a far more positive experience:

'My personal advisor was always available for me to talk to, about academic problems or personal. She really took the time to help me, which I really appreciated.'

(FTV NSS 2010)

The system of advisors is difficult to make consistent across Schools because of the differing staff student ratios, and the time each advisor can dedicate to their students. However, there are other methods of ensuring that students receive academic support in their studies. The Norwich Business School has a high staff student ratio, and so in order for students to be able to access academic advice, they are piloting a scheme whereby postgraduate students will be on hand to discuss any issues that undergraduate students might have with their course. This pilot scheme should be monitored, and if successful should be extended throughout the university.

Recommendation 2.1

- i) That the University appoint a senior member of the academic division to take responsibility for students studying joint honours degrees.
- ii) More effectively organise information available regarding interdisciplinary courses.
- iii) Embed study skills in course content.
- iv) Improve student staff ratios to improve contact time and academic support.

2.2 Learner Voice

There are a variety of structures and mechanisms already in place at UEA which allow students to shape their own education. These range from Staff Student Liaison Committees to student representatives on Faculty and University committees. The initiative whereby students are directly involved in the way they are taught is a national one, and is a principle laid down in the report to HEFCE on student engagement by the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information⁵. However, the most recent Student Experience Report published by the NUS found that only '23% of students said that they felt involved in shaping the content, curriculum or design of the course, compared to the 57% of students that said they wanted to be involved doing this.'⁶

The Academic Officer comments:

'At UEA, there have been some strong developments in representation over the last year. Co-branding all the Union's representation support materials with the University shows that representation is becoming more of a partnership venture. We aim to work more with University to develop this further. A strong culture of student representation, or the 'learner voice' is essential so that problems are highlighted by students as they arise, and can be resolved before they become bigger issues in the National Student Survey.'

This year, the Union aims to improve the system of representation even further. We want to train and recruit more student reps in each School so that as broad a cohort of students as possible are fully represented. In order to do this, we will need strong support from Schools and Faculty managers so that the system is effectively publicised. We would like students to be encouraged to take part in representing their course-mates from the start of their university life. The opportunities to do so should be made clear at induction.

Recommendation 2.2

For the University to continue to work in partnership with the Union to enable students to shape their own education. A culture of effective student representation should be developed in Schools and Faculties from induction. Students should be encouraged to voice problems and Staff Student Liaison Committees should aim to create positive change.

2.3 Promptness and Quality of Feedback

As with most universities, UEA's lowest-scoring category in the NSS 2010 is 'Assessment and Feedback'. Since 2009, the University's calendar has stated that 'the University is moving to a norm where feedback and provisional marks on summative coursework are returned to students no later than 20 working days after the published deadline for submission'⁷. This is an important principle and whilst all other areas of satisfaction are in decline, the NSS results in Table E show that students are increasingly satisfied with the promptness of feedback.

⁵ http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/2009/rdo3_09/

⁶ http://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/4017/NUS_StudentExperienceReport.pdf 04/11/2010

⁷ University Calendar 2010

Table E	Satisfaction in %		
	NSS 2010	NSS 2009	NSS 2008
5 The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.	72	74	75
6 Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair.	77	77	80
7 Feedback on my work has been prompt.	64	61	61
8 I have received detailed comments on my work.	67	71	73
9 Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand.	59	61	62

However, some individual Schools have seen a fall in the promptness of feedback, as shown in Table F:

Table F National Student Survey 2010 Top five rises and falls since 2009 in percentage points in satisfaction with promptness of feedback	
MUS	+32
DEV	+27
AHP	+19
BIO	+18
MED	+16
NAM	-4
NBS	-4
PHA	-7
LAW	-18
ECO	-21

Students need time between assessments to examine the feedback on their previous piece of work before writing the next one. The principle of feedback as an important learning method should be supported by well-structured modules which allow time between assessments for students to learn from previous performances.

One AMS student commented in the NSS 2010:

'Although the feedback I receive is generally insightful and fair, I find there is usually little time to really take in what they've said and improve upon my writing skills before the next assignment is in.'

Though the prompt return of coursework is desirable, it should not be at the expense of detailed and useful feedback, as this student comments:

'Feedback on coursework has, for the most part, been consistently bad over the course of my studies. Not enough information has been available to help me understand where I went wrong, and often no comments have been made at all. When deadlines for student hand in are so strict I believe that the hand back date should also be strictly kept to which has often not been the case throughout my degree.'

(BIO NSS 2010)

The most worrying element of assessment and feedback that NSS highlights is that only 59% of UEA students feel that their feedback has helped them clarify things that they didn't understand. Table C on page 20 shows that this is 3% lower than in 2008. Table G below shows the perceived helpfulness of feedback by School, which varies dramatically from 82% to 18%.

Table G National Student Survey 2010 Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand. (Satisfaction in %)				
HIS 82	ART 67	NAM 65	PHI 58	AHP 46
LIT 73	FTV 67	PHA 65	ENV 56	NBS 46
PSI 69	BIO 66	MUS 64	DEV 55	LAW 43
MTH 68	LCS 66	UEA 59	CHE 52	MED 41
AMS 67	ECO 65	CMP 58	SWP 49	EDU 18

The Academic Officer comments:

'Schools such as MTH which demonstrate good practice in terms of making marking criteria clear in advance, as well as giving detailed feedback, have considerably higher scores in feedback helping students to clarify things they didn't understand. It is clear that these factors directly influence the effectiveness of feedback. Hence, feedback as a learning aid is vital, as it should always improve students' understanding. The University aims to focus on assessment and feedback as a result of this year's National Student Survey, which is a positive step. Perhaps improvements could be gained through the provision of an annual report on feedback from the University to the Student Experience Committee, so that issues around the quality and timeliness of feedback could be monitored over time and addressed across Schools and Faculties.'

Recommendation 2.3

- i) For the University to ensure that modules without significant projects and dissertations meet the stated goal of a 20 working day period for the return of detailed feedback to students. However, the prompt return of coursework should not be at the expense of detailed and useful feedback.
- ii) To examine the disparity between schools on the perceived usefulness of feedback to see if best practice can be shared to improve results for NSS.

2.4 Feedback on Exams

The Union has been campaigning for exam feedback since 2008, because students at UEA are overwhelmingly in favour of getting feedback on their exams. Students have complained at the lack of exam feedback over a series of National Student Surveys.

In 2007 an NBS student wrote:

'Exam papers are never given back so I will never know where I [went] wrong and how to improve exam skills.'

Similarly, in the National Student Survey 2009 a LAW student stated that:

'UEA does not allow you to have your essays or exam papers back after marking due to 'university policy'. I know that this is not the procedure followed at other universities and have no idea why they restrict us from seeing them. It is difficult to learn from your mistakes when you cannot see where you went wrong, and I don't see how this is beneficial for a student.'

This year, an ENV student commented in the National Student Survey that:

'Unlike coursework, no feedback is given on exams so I found it very difficult to know how to improve.'

In the Union's 2010 Priority Campaigns Poll⁸, it was voted for as one of the students' top priorities for the year, coming second only to fighting the rise in tuition fees.

The NUS have just released their Charter on Assessment and Feedback⁹ which states that feedback should not be exclusive to certain forms of assessment. Furthermore the most recent Student Experience Report compiled by the NUS states that 90% of students nationally would like to receive feedback on their exams. Moreover, our Annual Student Survey 2010, see Table H, found that 86.1% of UEA students agreed with the statement "I would find feedback on my exams useful". Indeed, one student commented in our Annual Student Survey:

'The 'hungry for feedback' campaign is a worthwhile campaign and if successful would have changed my university experience for the better.'

In a climate where students will expect more from their education and the University is aiming to improve the student experience, the evidence below demonstrates that feedback on exams would be instrumental in improving learning and teaching.

Table H Annual Student Survey 2010 Response to the question "I would find feedback on my exams useful"	
Response	Percentage of respondents
Strongly agree	60.4%
Agree	25.7%
Neither agree nor disagree	8.8%
Disagree	3.3%
Strongly Disagree	1.8%

As far as the Union is aware, there are only limited occasions within the University where students receive feedback on their exams. Some module organisers produce generic reports about the exam for the whole cohort of students, and the School of

⁸The Union conducted an on-line poll with 8 campaign options in October 2010, with 796 respondents.

⁹<http://www.nus-connect.org/news/article/highereducation/720/>

Medicine provides information to students about which quartile their mark places them in to help students distinguish between a weak pass and a strong pass. This good practice was noted by a student:

'Feedback on assessments has been good and useful.' (MED, NSS 2010)

In January 2009 the Union's Academic Officer presented a paper to the University's Exams and Course Tests Review Group asking for:

- a) A policy requiring feedback on all summer examinations, not including course tests for all non-finalists
- b) To examine the possibility of a system where students could view or be returned their own scripts
- c) Improve support for students preparing for exams

We recommend that the University should take steps to investigate how feedback on exams could be extended throughout Schools and Faculties. The University could investigate examination feedback practices introduced at other, similar Higher Education Institutions.

In April 2010 the Union's Academic Officer presented a further report to the Taught Programmes Policy Group demonstrating the strength of feeling among students for exam feedback. It recommended that the University:

- 1) Encourage School Directors of Teaching and Learning to use the statistics found by our surveys to pilot 'lower resource' forms of feedback on exams that appear to be supported by a good percentage of students in their School, such as generic feedback for a module. This is already standard practice in MED.
- 2) Provide students with basic statistics such as a breakdown of their marks by question or results presented in quartiles.
- 3) Reduce the summative assessment burden on students so that in-depth feedback is given on fewer pieces of assessment, and look to expand formative assessment.

These recommendations, if implemented, would foster a culture of useful feedback which develops students' skills for when they complete a piece of summative assessment.

Recommendation 2.4

- For the University to introduce appropriate feedback for all pieces of assessment including exams, and to move towards embedding formative assessment in all courses as previously recommended by the Union.

2.5 Marking Criteria

In order for students to achieve the best marks they can, it is important that they have clear guidelines which set out the criteria they are expected to meet. A particular question in the NSS 2010 addresses this issue, with just 72% stating that the marking criteria have been clear in advance. Table E on page 20 shows that this has declined

3% since 2008. Table I below shows the score for clarity of marking criteria in advance by School:

Table I National Student Survey 2010 The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance (Satisfaction in %)				
PHA 96	ECO 80	ENV 73	HIS 71	LAW 63
CMP 89	FTV 80	NBS 73	MUS 71	NAM 62
MTH 89	LCS 80	LIT 72	CHE 69	DEV 57
ART 83	PSI 80	UEA 72	SWP 68	PHI 51
BIO 80	AMS 76	AHP 71	MED 65	EDU 18

There are also individual comments which suggest that students are not satisfied with the current level of provision of marking criteria. A LIT student commented in the NSS 2010 that:

'At times, the marking system has seemed a little vague... sometimes the difference between a good or bad mark is the personal marking tastes of the marker... Some more rigid criteria would be appreciated.'

The use of marking criteria should be more than just for assessing a student's work. They should be made widely and easily available to students to understand how their learning will be tested, and what they are expected to achieve.

Certainly, Schools with high percentages of students who were satisfied that marking criteria were clear in advance, have ensured that criteria are published in prominent places such as student handbooks. This is the current practice in MTH, and in NBS some lecturers attach the marking criteria to each piece of assessment a student gets back. These are strong examples of good practice which could easily be adopted across the University. We recommend that the University publish clear and concise marking criteria for each piece of assessment. The mark that a student receives should always be clearly related to these criteria.

Moreover, in comparing the Schools in Tables I and J, it is clear that the provision of marking criteria to students appears to relate directly to how fairly students believe they have been assessed.

Table J National Student Survey 2010 Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair (Satisfaction in %)				
MTH 96	LCS 87	CHE 78	ENV 75	MED 69
PHA 94	FTV 83	PHI 77	AMS 73	AHP 66
HIS 90	ECO 82	UEA 77	LAW 72	NAM 64
BIO 89	PSI 82	LIT 76	MUS 71	DEV 62
ART 87	CMP 81	SWP 75	NBS 70	EDU 29

2.7 Additional Course Costs

The Union's Student Experience Report of 2009 highlighted the issue of hidden course costs. The Academic Officer subsequently presented a report¹⁰ to both the Student Experience and the Student Admission and Recruitment committees.

The report recommended that the University should:

1. Lobby funding organisations to cover compulsory checks and appointments or consider covering them from tuition fee income.
2. Make reading lists and other relevant course information available to students as soon as possible.
3. Ensure that it is clear to students about which items they will be charged for well in advance.
4. Change the Code of Practice for Placement Learning to ensure students are always provided with information about estimated costs of placements.
5. Introduce electronic submission of coursework.
6. Highlight potential additional costs to applicants and those who have received offers through websites, printed information and on open and induction days.
7. Highlight potential additional costs before returning students select or start their modules, through easily accessible forums like School websites or module guides.

The report was based on data from the NSS 2009 and the Union's Annual Student Survey. It highlighted several causes for concern: principally that students were unable to plan their budgets if costs were not brought to their attention early enough in their course. Some students felt that these expenses should be covered by their fees.

There are several courses and disciplines in which students incur extra and 'hidden' costs which are necessary for them to pay in order to complete their studies. Table M lists the potential additional costs that a student may incur as listed in the UEA Calendar;

Late Registration	£15
Beyond Late Registration	£5 per day
Late enrolment	£10
Late Fees	(of up to £50)
Replacement Campus Card	£10
Change in payment method	£10
Unpaid cheque/direct debit	£15
Reassessment Fees	£110
Overseas reassessment	£175

¹⁰Additional Course Costs, UUEAS . Copy available from author.

Other costs which students have to pay which are not outlined in the University's guidelines include; books and equipment, printing and binding, compulsory checks and appointments and placement costs. The University's Calendar, which states its regulations, denotes that:

'Students are advised that, where they are obliged to attend field work or field courses or where there is an optional or required year abroad they will incur additional expenditure.'

This information is not always made widely available to students, and so this information does not reach them before they start studying at UEA. Hence, students are often surprised to find that they have extra costs to finance. Higher tuition fees can only make these extra costs more frustrating for new students. Additional course costs may be a potential source of resentment for new students who may have to find the extra resources to finance them. Students have commented this year that:

'Book lists should be available well ahead of term to students. No one told [me] I would have to spend 120 pounds on books in my first term!'

(Annual Student Survey 2010)

In this year's NSS, there were a range of comments around printing costs. Many students are dissatisfied with the fact that they have to pay for all the printing they do for their course. It is a particular source of resentment for students who get no budget from their Schools to help them pay for printing materials. There seems to be some dissatisfaction that students in other Schools do not have to pay extra printing costs because they are provided with printing credits. Indeed, this is the case in Schools such as MTH, where undergraduates are given 100-150 pages of printing credit each month.

One student from NBS stated that:

'In some subjects we have to print off our own lecture slides and seeing as we pay huge amounts of money to be here, the least they could do is have lecture slides. Many other schools within the university are given free printing.'

Furthermore, a student in PSI declared:

'It is impossible to live entirely on one's student loan, particularly with the cost of textbooks as high as they are.'

(PSI NSS 2010)

This year in the School of Biology, a system has been introduced whereby students are provided with handouts on Blackboard rather than having them printed out for lectures. This was discussed in Staff Student Liaison Committees in 2009, and a comment made then stated that:

'Students are not against printing out the hand-outs themselves ahead of the lecture, but would need an increased allowance for printing. Also [they] would not be able to print double-sided, so [this] may not address wastage issue.'

(BIO SSLC comment Feb 2009)

However, no move to give students extra printing credits has been introduced, though the School is doing all it can to place lecture hand-outs on Blackboard as early as possible for students.



It seems that there is a general feeling that students ought to be told about any additional course costs they will have to fund even before they begin their studies at UEA. Moreover, there should be an emphasis placed on which materials are absolutely essential for students to purchase, as this student comments:

'I think there should be a certain extent to which a subsidy is provided for textbooks and other course related materials. Also it would be helpful to know from the school of study exactly how much we are going to use a particular book as I have spent £60 on an anthology collection that we have only used 3 or 4 readings from each volume, and I could have photocopied the passages instead.'

(Annual Student Survey 2010)

Postgraduates also feel that their additional course costs can cause them financial difficulties, as this student states:

'The additional costs have at least equalled the course fee: i.e. travel to archives and accommodation costs while working there; book purchases, computer hardware costs, software costs (e.g. Endnote, SPSS for home use) and maintenance, travel to and from campus. Being entirely self-funded this has had a considerable impact on my budget.'

(Annual Student Survey 2010)

Recommendation 2.7

For the University to give feedback to the Union's Academic Officer about the actions being undertaken from the recommendations that the Union made last academic year about additional course costs..

2.8 Provision of Timetables and Other Information

The early publication of information which is necessary for a student to be able to study and learn effectively should be encouraged. This year, the University's SIS Project Board failed to provide the intended improvements to the timetabling system. The errors made in timetabling have negatively impacted the ability of students to take part in their education, as this recent comment in an e-mail from a student in NAM shows:

'I am unable to access my timetable ... I need to know the timetables [as soon as possible] so I can organise childcare.'

Whilst the Union understands that the problems were caused by difficulties with software, we hope that by next semester the situation will vastly improve the experience that students have with their timetables. It is unacceptable that there have been many students unable to make childcare and part-time work arrangements because of this lack of information.

Another example of where students are dissatisfied with the timeliness of information is that of reading lists. This is commented on by a LIT student in this year's NSS:

'Timetables are given with too little warning; any student who works, which let's face it, is pretty much all of us, has no time to rearrange hours before the semester begins. Equally, reading lists are very often given just before the semester. Being able to get a head start on

the reading helps to alleviate stress and time management problems. It also helps us to get books in time!

The early provision of information for students, such as reading lists and placement details, allows them to plan and budget more effectively.

••••• Recommendation 2.8

- For the University to ensure that timetables, reading lists and placement information
- are published as early as reasonably possible and in an accessible way.

2.9 Library and Learning Resources

The library has made considerable improvements to its systems and management in the last year. The move from a local system of classification to the standard Library of Congress classification was completed with minimal disruption to students. Also, the refurbishments that have taken place over the course of the summer have proved to be beneficial for the many students who use the library, such as the inclusion of an area where students can eat and drink, as well as the provision of accessible private study areas for students with disabilities. These improvements have increased usage of the library, proven by the 12% rise in the amount of people who have been through the doors in comparison with the first week of the semester in 2009.

There are many positive outcomes for the library and providers of learning resources in the National Student Survey 2010. The satisfaction of students who use the library has seen a considerable rise in a broad range of Schools and Faculties. However, there are still areas which could be improved upon, as indicated by one student from the School of History:

'The lack of funding for specific electronic services lets the whole school down. Luckily some modules do not rely too heavily on these resources, but when it comes to dissertations you really do need access to the best that is available.'

(NSS 2010)

To address this issue, over the summer the library made a number of textbooks available via e-resources, with Teaching Enhancement and Student Success funding from the Learning and Teaching Committee. However, students still feel that more need to be made available, and they have indicated the need for a better provision of more specific on-line learning resources.

Whilst the library extended its opening hours in January 2008, there are still students particularly from the Faculty of Health, who would like to see an extension of the library's opening hours outside of the standard 12 week semester:

A MED student commented:

'Library opening hours are inflexible, especially during the summer when we are still here revising for exams, and they do not take us into consideration. In terms of library resources there are not enough books and general access is shocking considering what a small medical school we are.'

(NSS 2010)

Recommendation 3.1

For the University to create a far-reaching, resourced and sustainable Community Strategy in partnership with the Union. This strategy should include such themes as promoting neighbourliness and safety.

3.2 Transport

The University's Travel Policy 2010 has seen progress on a range of issues. The significant investment in campus cycling facilities, and the new route 30 bus are two key examples of this.

The Union still believes that the ability to park in the main car park should be judged entirely on need, and should not be dependent on an applicant's staff or student status. However, within the context of the planning circumstances, the relocation of overflow car parking to the Costessey Park & Ride should alleviate many concerns around safety and security between the main campus and the overflow car park at the Institute for Food Research. Yet, this new service must be time and cost efficient if it is to truly meet the needs of students.

Concerns are often still raised about the quality of service from First Buses. These concerns are mainly around three topics: accurate timetable information, reliability, and fares. These students comment:

'[Ask] the bus companies...to produce relevant timetable that are up to date. The buses never arrive when they're timetabled to.'

(Annual Student Survey 2010)

'Improve the services of buses running, not only on the main Unthank and Earlham Roads, but also smaller routes like Dereham etc.'

(Annual Student Survey 2010).

'Get a proper answer out of the bus company as to why the service has become more expensive yet so much less efficient.'

(Annual Student Survey 2010)

Comments about transport feature frequently in the NSS and the Union's own Annual Student Survey. Further, in our Priority Campaigns Poll, improving car parking and the bus service was shown to be a key priority for UEA students- and something which the Union will be focusing on over the year ahead.

Recommendation 3.2

For the University to continue to work with local bus providers to make the case for a reliable, reasonably priced bus service, and that the new Park and Ride service be as cost and time efficient to student users as is reasonably possible.

3.3 Student Support

For many students at UEA, the support services offered are integral to their student experience. It is clear that over the past years, demands on these services have increased and this seems likely to continue.

Union of UEA Students: Going Forward & Looking Back

Our Successes

Over the last year we have made huge steps towards becoming a more effective and member-led organisation. We have a new governance structure with an improved Trustee Board including external trustees, which reflects our new status as a charity. We also changed one of our full-time officer titles from Welfare to Community and Student Rights Officer, to emphasise the importance we place on engaging with the wider community.

Our campaigns have been strong this year, with the general election campaign entitled 'Vote for Students' engaging 1200 students to vote in our on-campus polling station. This tripled the turnout of previous years. This particular campaign also resulted in the Union of UEA Students being the only Students' Union in Higher Education to be shortlisted for the NUS's Campaign of the Year Award 2010.

Improvements in our communications have led to the launch of our brand new website, and the use of online voting for the first time ever in our student officer elections, which resulted in a record turn-out.

The Union has also invested in its people. Three new posts have been incorporated into our team; a Membership Services Manager, HR Manager, and a Building Services Supervisor. We are now looking to recruit an additional advisor into our Advice Centre. These posts will help the Union to realise our mission, vision and values and also enable Student Officers to spend more time engaging with and representing students. Finally, we have recently appointed a new Chief Executive who is due to start work in the New Year. We believe that this person will bring a range of skills and knowledge which will help drive the Union's strategic development, and ensure that we are focused on delivering services that meet the needs of our members.

By improving our staffing resource and introducing more systematic methods of obtaining and analysing membership feedback, we have made the way we represent students more professional and evidence based.

One of the most exciting developments of this year is the Union's investment in the Students Union Evaluation Initiative (SUEI). Engaging in this process has already improved co-operation and understanding across the organisation. We are optimistic about the impact this will have on the levels of quality and service we provide for our members. We are aiming for accreditation during this academic year.

Furthermore, the commercial arm of the Union has been nominated by the CLUB AWARDS for being the Best Students' Union, and also for an award for the best on campus venue in the country by trade magazine LIVE UK.

Planning for our Future

The Union of UEA Students is financially secure, with the retail arms still operating at a profit despite rising costs, the recession and difficult trading in the licensed trade sector. In light of this, the Union is looking to develop a commercial strategy that seeks to branch out into new areas of commercial operations to ensure its long term financial viability.

The Union is aiming to build upon the support that we provide for our clubs and societies. We want to improve the level of engagement of our members as well as support those who work hard to provide opportunities for others. The new Volunteering Award which we have created this year with Voluntary Norfolk attempts to recognise the various ways that our students positively contribute to both the student and local community.

With the Browne Report recommending such astronomical levels of tuition fees and the impending cuts to higher education outlined in the Comprehensive Spending Review, the Union will work with the University to ensure that improving the student experience remains a high priority. We will also continue to lobby local MPs and the government over the issue of tuition fees which affects all students.

The principle areas for Union to develop in are representation and membership services. The Union is committed to ensuring that all students are supported through representation, campaigns and services. We are working in partnership with the University in a number of areas, particularly course representation and we believe that a positive relationship with the University is essential to improving the experience of our members.

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