

UEA Student Experience 2009







Introduction

This inaugural report is an exciting new development for the student experience at UEA. It takes evidence from a wide range of sources and presents to the University an overview of the opinions of our membership.

Whatever source of evidence one examines, the message comes back loud and clear – UEA students are very happy with the education and experience on offer at this University.

However, there are always opportunities for any organisation to improve and where we think the University could move forward we have presented clear action points for change. Student officers and representatives look forward to working in partnership with the University on these action points through the next year.

I could not finish this introduction without mentioning the review of Higher Education, due to be completed during the next year, which may well change Universities and Higher Education beyond all recognition. As part of that review the Government will revisit UK undergraduate fees and we hope that the University and its staff will support UEA students in calling for an end to a funding system that is so obviously unfair to so many of our membership.

Finally I give thanks to the countless members of staff around the University who help, support and listen to student officers and student representatives as they seek to shape their education and the community around them.

Yours in unity,

David Sheppard
Academic Officer 2008-10
Union of UEA Students



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Methodology

The UEA Student Experience Report has been compiled and edited by the Academic Officer of The Union of UEA Students (the Union). The Academic Officer was supported by the Welfare Officer, Communications Officer and Finance Officer of the Union.

The author makes a set of recommendations at the end of each section that are summarised on pages 4 and 5.

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 (Appendix)
National Student Survey	2007, 2008 and 2009.	Final year undergraduates	2007 - 1500 2008 – 1590 2009 - 1670	Quantitative and Qualitative	NSS2008 and NSS2009
Postgraduate Research Experience Survey	2008 and 2009	Postgraduate Research students	2008 – 224 2009 – 332 [NB: these are 22% and 28% response rates respectively]	Quantitative	PRES2008 PRES2009
Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey	2009	Postgraduate Taught students	2009 – 256 [NB: this is 12.6% response rate]	Quantitative and Qualitative	PTES2009
Students at Work	2009	All students	647	Quantitative and Qualitative	UEA SaW
CommUnity responses	2009	8000 Norwich residents	34	Qualitative	n/a
Staff Student Liaison Committee minutes	2008-09	UEA student representatives	n/a	Qualitative	n/a
Additional qualitative data was gathered from direct emails or comments to student officers and from posts on the social networking site, Facebook.					

Action Points



The University should:

- A** - Publically oppose tuition fees for Home/EU undergraduate students and lobby within the 1994 Group and beyond for a fair and sustainable Higher Education funding model.
- B** - Redouble its efforts to help recent graduates make the connections in relevant industries and the professions. A small amount of relevant research and other applied skills training should be sensitively embedded in every course.
- C** - Be explicit about other course costs at open days, in pre-arrival information and at induction to allow students ample opportunity to budget for additional costs. The University should also reconsider the reassessment fee in light of a move to every module having to be passed to complete an undergraduate degree.
- D** - Closely monitor the impact of working during term time on students and pay particular attention to enhancements that support working students like the earlier release of timetables, staggered assessment deadlines and an end to Saturday exams.
- E** - Continue to maintain the high standard of teaching, research supervision and support that it already gives.
- F** - Adopt the use of the standard agreement between student and supervisor on all taught postgraduate dissertation modules.
- G** - Publish clear and concise marking criteria for each piece of assessment. The mark that a student receives should always be obviously related to these criteria.
- H** - Examine improvements to the anonymous marking system for dyslexic students.
- I** - The University should ensure that modules without significant projects and dissertations meet the stated goal of a 20 working days period for the return of feedback to students.
- J** - Introduce appropriate feedback for all pieces of assessment including exams.
- K** - Ensure that timetables, reading lists and placement information are published early and in an easily accessible way.
- L** - Continue to expand and enhance electronic provision of key books and journals wherever it can to allow greater access. It should also encourage further work between particular Schools and the Library when student surveys have shown a particular need.



- M** - Work with students and their Union to ensure that proposals regulating the distribution of Houses of Multiple Occupancy are in the best interests of the whole community.
- N** - Use the entire first week of the standard semester for a full induction programme for new students.
- O** - Establish a fair system of car parking allocation that is needs-based and that does not allow unnecessary use. The University should also ensure that access to parking provision is quick and safe.
- P** - Work with First Eastern Counties to achieve improvements in the quality of the service that students and staff receive on the buses to and from campus.
- Q** - Work with the Union to develop relationships with other public transport providers and arrange potential concessions for student commuters.
- R** - Conduct a full investigation into alternatives to Congregation Hall for graduation.
- S** - Support the Union in the development of non-alcohol social space.
- T** - Further demonstrate its commitment to sustainability by adopting a policy encompassing both ethical and environmental procurement criteria, by signing up for the Environmental Impact Awards to engage students and staff in environmental behavioural change and by no longer providing travel expenses for domestic and short-range continental flights.
- U** - Engage student officers in formative-stage involvement in the University's Corporate Plan 2013-2016
- V** - Review membership of committees dealing with planning issues to include student representation at a formative stage.

1. Employment and Higher Education funding

1.1 Fees and Funding

The summer of 2009 saw the Graduation of the first cohort of UEA undergraduate students who will pay “top-up” fees of £3145. That fact, coupled with a recession and the resulting reduction in the opportunities for employment, has meant a difficult landscape for 2009 graduates. It is wholly unsurprising that the national satisfaction of UK undergraduates has seen a small fall in the National Student Survey by one percentage point.

The decline in satisfaction nationally for UK students has been mirrored at UEA by a two percent fall in UK undergraduate satisfaction. However satisfaction for UEA EU and non-EU undergraduates has risen; for non-EU students the rise was a considerable seven percentage points:

Table A (Percentage in agreement with “overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course”)	
UK % Agree 2009	90
UK % Agree 2008	92
Sector-wide % Agree 2009	82
EU (excl UK) % Agree 2009	85
EU (excl UK) % Agree 2008	84
EU (excl UK) Sector-wide % Agree 2009	81
Non-EU % Agree 2009	93
Non-EU % Agree 2008	86
Non-EU Sector-wide % Agree 2009	82

Comments in the National Student Survey echoed this dissatisfaction:

“The cost is frankly ridiculous and does not reflect the efforts of the government to make everything more accessible regardless of background.” BIO NSS2009

“Two hours of contact time a week for £3145 a year in tuition fees is extremely expensive. Given that even this is subsidised by the government, exactly where is all this money going?! To be honest, it feels like you're paying for the privilege of doing a degree than for the actual costs incurred by your study at an institution.” HIS NSS2009



"I was always against the tuition fees. These have now gone up £2000. The government want 50% of people to go to university... but we seem to be treating academia as some system for training people how to manage debt. If we're not careful, I fully believe something great will be lost for good." MTH NSS2009

It is not just current students that are unhappy with the current system of Higher Education funding. The Union of UEA Students has received letters, emails and phone calls from dozens of local residents making comments like these:

"I passionately feel it's unforgivable to saddle students with horrendous debts especially in the current economic climate... these people are our futures in business, politics and employment and they will be contributing financially – taxes, pensions etc. We should be encouraging them!" CommUnity response 2009

"I am 84 and was a student nurse in London during World War II. Later as a Nurse-Tutor I taught students in hospitals. I feel very strongly about this iniquitous practice of charging University students in England..." CommUnity response 2009

The University does offer a comprehensive system of bursaries and scholarships and as Table B shows the University spends more on student support than most comparable institutions. However, the University's bursary and scholarship spend per student is comparatively low:

Table B ¹				
Selected Higher Education Institutions	Total OFFA countables	B&S Per Student	Overall Expenditure	
	%		%	£k
University of Essex	40	£689	15.9	1222
University of East Anglia	42	£749	23.1	2739
University of Leicester	37	£954	21.3	1749
University of Sussex	23	£1,038	16.8	1246
Loughborough University	25	£1,053	16.8	1766
University of York	31	£1,082	21.3	1585
University of Surrey	33	£1,099	19.1	1144
University of Reading	35	£1,115	29.2	2386
University of Bath	29	£1,147	20.9	1530
University of Exeter	33	£1,278	20.9	2285
Lancaster University	29	£1,334	21.6	1713
University of Durham	23	£2,291	30.1	3222

¹ Office of Fair Access OFFA Access agreement monitoring: Outcomes for 2007-08. >http://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/monitoring-outcomes-07-08_offa-report-a-w.pdf< [Accessed 28/09/09]

Table B Key:

OFFA Countables – OFFA 'countable students' are those from lower-income or other underrepresented groups. OFFA defines "lower-income" students as those with an assessed household income of up to £48,330.

B and S Per Student – Bursary and Scholarship average spend per OFFA countable student.

Overall expenditure % - overall expenditure as a percentage of expenditure

Overall expenditure actual. – overall expenditure in £k.





Despite this comprehensive local system of bursaries and scholarships, students are experiencing and anticipating further financial difficulties. Many UK students joining UEA in September 2009 had considerable difficulties accessing the relevant support through the Student Loans Company². The Government also announced in July 2009 that postgraduate teacher training grants will be restricted to applicants from lower income homes. For 2011 entry, teaching students with household incomes above £34,000 will pay for the majority of the cost of their course through loans instead of grants³. The Department of Health is also about to begin consultation on changes to the system of funding for NHS-funded students - any modifications will affect Health students starting their course in September 2011.

Postgraduate Research [PGR] students are not particularly content with student finance either. Nearly half of UEA PGR students surveyed in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey [PRES2009] suggest that the financing of a research degree places a strain on their personal finances and less than half of student think that funding is “appropriate”.

Table C				
PRES2009 – Satisfaction	UEA 2009	UEA 2008	National 2009	National 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%

It is widely expected that the review of Higher Education, including a review of University funding for undergraduates, will begin shortly and will report after the next general election in summer 2010. With this review in mind, the Academic Officer comments:

“Students are being failed by the current system of Higher Education funding. The recent squeeze on undergraduate places is so obviously counter-productive in a recession. UEA students have also recently expressed their anger at the inflexible and unhelpful way grants and loans are administered and means-tested by the Student Loan Company. Higher Education is becoming prohibitively expensive for so many and the massive debt it leaves is a difficult reality for almost all. The students that I represent are calling out for change and we hope the University will support their call in the forthcoming review.”



The University should publically oppose tuition fees for Home/EU undergraduate students and lobby within the 1994 Group and beyond for a fair and sustainable Higher Education funding model.

² See “Norfolk students left without loans” Eastern Daily Press 18/9/09 ><http://www.edp24.co.uk/content/edp24/news/story.aspx?brand=EDPOnline&category=NewsSplash&tBrand=EDPOnline&tCategory=xDefault&itemid=NOED17%20Sep%202009%2022%3A24%3A33%3A207>< [Accessed 28/09/09]

³ See “student grants and loans to be frozen and tuition fees to be increased” The Guardian 01/07/09 ><http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/jul/01/student-grants-loans-frozen>< [Accessed 28/09/09]



1.2 Graduate Employability

There is not a lot to celebrate for graduates who are currently seeking work. The following headlines are from recent media coverage:

“Deep in debt, the student class of 2009 emerge to face harsh reality” The Guardian 10/6/2009 ⁴

“Graduate unemployment set to double to 40,000 amid struggle to find work in recession” The Daily Mail 11/6/2009 ⁵

“Norwich graduates face jobs gloom” Eastern Daily Press 13/08/09 ⁶

As the current recession has emerged, the thoughts of prospective and current students have regularly turned towards the “graduate premium” – that is the additional lifetime earnings as a results of having a degree. Table D demonstrates the disparity between average graduate earnings.

Table D Gross additional lifetime earnings (wage premiums) by degree subject compared to two or more GCE A-levels ⁷ [Selected]	
Medicine	£340,315
Maths/Computer sciences	£241,749
Physical/Environmental science	£237,935
Business and finance	£184,694
Social sciences	£169,267
Subjects allied to medicine	£166,017
Average degree	£160,061
Education	£114,935
Biosciences	£111,269
European languages	£96,281
Linguistics	£71,920
Humanities	£51,549
Arts	£34,494

This data obviously illustrates the pressure that will fall on the Arts and Humanities if Higher Education becomes a genuine marketplace. Arts and Humanities may also face threats in the review of the funding councils and other HE organisations recently announced by the Business Secretary, Lord Mandelson⁸.

Data published by the Times Higher Education in July 2009 shows that UEA is doing better than many of its competitors in the employability statistics.

⁴ ><http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/jun/10/university-students-jobs-recession>< [Accessed 28/09/09]

⁵ ><http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1192349/Graduate-unemployment-set-double-soaring-numbers-struggle-work-amid-recession.html>< [Accessed 28/09/09]

⁶ ><http://www.edp24.co.uk/content/edp24/news/story.aspx?brand=EDPOnline&category=News&tBrand=EDPOnline&tCategory=xDefault&itemid=NOED13%20Aug%202009%2008%3A31%3A23%3A18>< [Accessed 28/09/09]

⁷ PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (2006) as reported in The Economic Benefits of a Degree Universities UK 2007.

⁸ See “Mandelson orders University funding review” The Guardian 15/09/09 ><http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2009/sep/15/mandelson-university-funding-review>< [Accessed 28/09/09]



Table E	
Employment indicator: Leavers obtaining first degrees from full-time courses. The indicator measures graduates in work or study within six months of completing their studies and is based on HESA data. ⁹	
Selected Higher education institutions	Indicator %
University of Surrey	96.7
University of East Anglia	93.7
University of Sussex	93.1
University of Durham	92.4
University of Bath	92.3
University of Leicester	91.9
University of Reading	91.6
Loughborough University	91.3
University of York	91.3
University of Exeter	91.2
Lancaster University	90.5
University of Essex	86.8

Many programmes at UEA include examples of good practice of how to develop students' skills and knowledge in a way that will be useful in the workplace or in further study. For instance, the first year AMS module "Study And Research Skills In Higher Education", the second year ENV/SCI unit "Teaching Science" and the final year DEV unit "Development Work Experience [DWE] all provide careers education that is embedded in the learning process.

The Welfare Officer comments:

"The recent recession has hit many UEA graduates hard. Despite the downturn, and Norfolk's geographical isolation, UEA has had some success in providing graduates with the skills, knowledge and connections they need to move forward. The University has also undertaken significant work to overhaul and improve the PGR Transitions training programme so it is more reflexive to students' needs. Any successful University activity that improves a graduate's employability or further study prospects should be sensitively embedded into the curriculum – and an expansion of similar modules to the ones discussed above might be an area the University wishes to concentrate on."



The University should redouble its efforts to help recent graduates make the connections in relevant industries and professions. A small amount of relevant research and other applied skills training should be sensitively embedded in every course.



⁹ "Graduate unemployment rises" Times Higher Education 19/7/09 ><http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=26&storycode=407431&c=<> [Accessed 28/09/09]
Table D is based on data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency [HESA].



1.3 Other Course Costs

Research by the National Union of Students recently published highlights the significant disparity of so-called “hidden” course costs. It shows that students of Mathematical Sciences and Computing Science Students are, on average, spending well over £1000 on books, equipment and fieldwork, while at the other end of the scale students on education courses spend on average around £400.¹⁰

For UEA students, the Calendar (the University’s book of regulations) 2009/10 warns:

“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.” Calendar 337

For students in Science there is a further warning:

“Student who enrol on field course modules offered in the Faculty of Science are entering into a financial commitment to pay their travel and accommodation and food costs. Students who are thus enrolled when accommodation and/or flights are booked will be liable to reimburse these costs in full to the School should they decide not to attend the field course.” Calendar 337-338.

Concerns about additional course costs have been raised by students across the University:

“There simply weren't enough books to cater for everyone on that course. They should've been put on short or restricted loan. As a result, I spent over £100 on books that I've used only once.” NSS FTV 2009

“JW stressed that student midwives are self funding their mobile phones whilst on community placement. Could the SHA fund this expense?” NAM SSLC 2009

Table F lists some of the additional fees and charges that the University may levy.

Table F : UEA Selected Fees and Charges [Calendar pp332 -338]	
Late registration	£15
Late examination entry	£10
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

¹⁰ Full details: Mathematical Sciences and Computer Science: £1430.40 • Medicine and Dentistry: £902.16 • Business and Administrative Studies: £873.36 • Creative Arts and Design: £701.04 • Engineering and Technology: £651.60 • Law: £642.48 • Languages: £635.28 • Historical and Philosophical Studies: £568.56 • Social Studies: £539.76 • Biological Sciences: £539.52 • Physical Sciences: £499.20 • Subjects allied to medicine: £461.52 • Education: £432.48. Hidden Course Costs NUS 2009 ><http://www.officeronline.co.uk/education/articles/276602.aspx>< [Accessed 28/09/09]



The Academic Officer comments:

"In this table the particularly striking figures are the reassessment fees. In May 2009, the Learning and Teaching Committee recommended that the University move to a situation where all modules must be passed at 40% - a move which I fully support. However, this might lead to more students facing reassessment, and as such it must be worth rethinking the considerable reassessment fee. Students new to the University and new to the UK Higher Education system must be given some breathing space. Reassessment must never be viewed as a punishment and students must not be fined excessively for a fail."



The University should be explicit about other course costs at open days, in pre-arrival information and at induction to allow students ample opportunity to budget for additional costs. The University should also reconsider the reassessment fee in light of a move to every module having to be passed to complete an undergraduate degree.

1.4 UEA Students at Work

In February, the Union published the findings of its Students at Work¹¹ survey. It found that student-workers at UEA:

- Are mainly employed in unskilled jobs [65%]
- Are most likely to work under sixteen hours in semester-time and between 25 and 32 hours in vacation-time.
- 1 in 5 students work over 17 hours in semester-time.
- Work fewer hours than the national average.
- Often feel that their jobs make them unable to engage in volunteering activity [51.4%] or participate in clubs, societies or representation [50.7%].
- Are unlikely to be a member of a trade union.

Although 46.1% of student-workers agreed with the statement that "paid employment was easy to combine with their studies" a number saw room for improvement:

"I think the University needs to be more understanding for those that are in full-time employment. Some people cannot afford not to work." UEA SaW 2009

¹¹ The findings of this survey appeared on the UEA Student Experience Committee agenda 18/02/09





“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. There does not seem to be any notion that sometimes our work may have to come first, since it is the only way we can afford to attend university. Equally, what with costs rising for students that are not off-set by government support, the work load given to students is the same as those who paid less and received more in the past.” UEA SaW 2009

“The most annoying thing is that the timetables are released so late I struggle to fit work in as I don't know my availability. They need to give us more notice about when we will need to be in and where, as for placements I could be in Lowestoft or Lynn which impacts on work.” UEA SaW 2009



To closely monitor the impact of working during term time on students and pay particular attention to enhancements that support working students like the earlier release of timetables, staggered assessment deadlines and an end to Saturday exams.

2. Education

2.1 Teaching and Supervision

UEA students are very satisfied with the quality of teaching on offer on their course. Table G shows the satisfaction of undergraduates in comparison to other students at other UK Higher Education Institutions [HEIs]:

Table G			
Satisfaction with the teaching on my course in NSS2009	UEA	HEIs	Top Quartile of HEIs
1. Staff are good at explaining things.	93	87	91
2. Staff have made the subject interesting.	89	79	84
3. Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching	92	83	88
4. The course is intellectually stimulating.	91	83	89

Many comments in the NSS2009 were also extremely positive about teaching and supervision:

“My time at UEA has been one of the most amazing experiences. I'm so thrilled I decided to come here. The course has been extremely enjoyable, and its flexibility has enabled me to focus on what areas I want.” ENV NSS2009

“Friendly staff, relaxing campus atmosphere, many resources, good student/university ethics, good local area, excellent teaching, dedication of teachers, wide variety of teaching styles and subjects, and the university is a good place for many different disciplines.” HIS NSS2009

“The personal touch which the university has with its students is a large positive. Professors take a lot of time in ensuring that you are happy and satisfied and will go to extensive lengths to solve any problems that you may have. Lecturers are readily available and are all happy to answer any queries or problems you may have with your course in a prompt and concise manner... the atmosphere is a very good environment for learning.” LAW NSS2009

In PRES 2009, postgraduate research students were also largely positive about the levels of supervision and support they received:

Table H		
	UEA 2009	UEA 2008
1.a. My supervisor/s have the skills and subject knowledge to adequately support my research	83%	83%
1.c. I have been given good guidance in topic selection and refinement by my supervisor/s	72%	70%
1.f. My supervisor/s are available when I need them	78%	74%



The University should continue to maintain the high standard of teaching, research supervision and support that it already gives.

Taught postgraduate students in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES2009) were also generally satisfied with their course:

“The quality and quantity of teaching has definitely exceeded my expectations. I am very impressed with the teaching standards and the friendliness, enthusiasm and approachability of the staff.” FOH PTES2009

“The teaching was excellent and the staff were generally inspirational.” HUM PTES2009

However, one of the recurring themes taught postgraduate students raised in PTES2009 was a lack of clarity or understanding about dissertation supervision at taught postgraduate level:

“I would prefer that our supervisor is available in the month of July and reset our dissertation deadline to the beginning of August. So that our supervisor can go to do their field work or travelling after we submit our dissertation.” SCI PTES2009

“I was also disappointed by my dissertation supervisor who has not been available and has not given me adequate support.” SSF PTES2009

“The taught modules were fantastically organised and delivered with interest and enthusiasm but I felt un-ready for the dissertation part of the course and I still feel that the tuition and support in this aspect has been lacking.” SCI PTES2009

In April 2009 Learning and Teaching Committee considered a document that would encourage a discussion between student and supervisor¹² about supervisory arrangements and some accompanying guidelines.

The Academic Officer comments:

“Taught postgraduates often feel significant frustration at the lack of clarity with the supervision of their dissertation. These students can feel neglected as workload pressures from undergraduate teaching and research mount up on academic staff. I think that a pro-forma agreement that encourages early discussions about expectations and forward planning would be a significant improvement.”



Adopt the use of the standard agreement between student and supervisor on all taught postgraduate dissertation modules.

2.2 Assessment and Feedback

As with most UK Universities, UEA's weakest category in the NSS2009 is “Assessment and Feedback”:

Table I	Satisfaction in %		
	NSS2009	NSS2008	NSS2007
5. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance	74	75	72
6. Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair	77	80	76
7. Feedback on my work has been prompt	61	61	60
8. I have received detailed comments on my work	71	73	69
9. Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand	61	62	59

The Academic Officer writes:

“Assessment and Feedback continues to be a priority for student officers and representatives. In previous years, my predecessors have been involved in fruitful discussions on anonymous coursework marking and promptness of feedback. Last year, we launched our “I’m Hungry for Feedback” campaign for examination feedback and in the coming months we’ll be sparking a Big Discussion across campus that will generate some principles of assessment and feedback.”

2.3 Marking criteria

An easily accessible set of marking criteria can form a key part of a fair and trusted assessment system and Table J shows the diversity of satisfaction on this subject at UEA:

Table J The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance (Satisfaction in %)				
PHA 94%	BIO 84%	PSI 75%	NBS 71%	CHE 65%
ART 93%	HIS 80%	FTV 75%	PHI 70%	LAW 64%
LLT/LCS 92%	AHP 80%	UEA 74%	AMS 70%	SWK/P 60%
CMP 85%	ECO 77%	MUS 72%	DRA 67%	MED 58%
MTH 85%	ENV 77%	NAM 72%	DEV 67%	LCW 57%

However, there is not necessarily a direct correlation between a clear marking criteria and a perceived fairness in the assessment methods. Table K below shows the satisfaction with assessment arrangements and marking. Highlighted in red in Table K are Schools that differed by over a ten percentage point difference with the data in Table J. For instance, LCW moves from the worst score in Table J to above average here and AHP suffers a significant fall:

Table K Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair (Satisfaction in %)				
PHA 94%	ART 84%	DEV 79%	NBS 75%	NAM 69%
HIS 92%	PHI 84%	LAW 77%	ENV 75%	CHE 68%
MTH 92%	ECO 83%	UEA 77%	FTV 72%	PSI 66%
CMP 88%	LCW 81%	AMS 75%	MUS 72%	SWK/P 65%
BIO 88%	LLT/LCS 79%	DRA 75%	MED 71%	AHP 59%

Whilst what students consider fair assessment arrangements obviously differs across disciplines, there is a general dissatisfaction present in a number of taught student comments from across the University:

“Just because the marking criteria is so subjective, I find it difficult to know how I should meet their criteria requirements and how its difficult to know how to make an essay a first standard rather than a 2:1 - it isn't obvious how to make it better.” LCW NSS2009

“The marking system is not adequate. There are large differences in individual staff opinions on marks awarded and this can result in grades dependant on marker not the value of the work.” ENV NSS2009



"Marking criteria not clear enough to understand. Disparity between lectures as to what should and should not pass. Overall, I felt that it was irrelevant how hard you work on an academic piece of work. The marking system was arbitrary." NAM NSS2009

"The way my work has been marked has seemed a bit haphazard sometimes, how can I get a 1st in one thing and a 2:2 in another when I have put the same amount of effort into each piece I am a third year and I still don't really understand why I get the marks I do sometimes. There are some lecturers which seem to expect a post graduate level of knowledge from their students and mark work too harshly, while there are others who are a bit too generous, more consistency is needed." DEV NSS2009

"Clearer marking criteria [needed]. The comments received and marks seemed often to be in contradiction: comments said you did very well, the papers did not present many corrections but then the mark was average." HUM PTES2009



The University should publish clear and concise marking criteria for each piece of assessment. The mark that a student receives should always be obviously related to these criteria.

2.4 Anonymous Coursework Marking

After a decade-long student campaign, anonymous coursework marking was introduced at UEA for taught students in September 2008. Table L shows significant rises in satisfaction in NSS2009 with assessment from undergraduate students with disabilities, non-EU international students and black students. However, it does show a significant fall in satisfaction from students with dyslexia who are not able to identify themselves as such in an anonymous system.



Table L			
6. Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair		NSS 2009	NSS 2008
	UEA	77	80
Age	Young	78	81
	Mature	76	76
Gender	Female	76	78
	Male	79	82
Disability	No known disability	78	80
	Dyslexic	67	81
	Disability (excluding dyslexia)	81	73
Fee Status	UK	90	92
	EU	85	84
	Other	93	86
Ethnicity	White	78	81
	Black	77	67
	Asian	76	79
	Other	66	80
	Not known	77	67



The University should examine improvements to the anonymous marking system for dyslexic students.

2.5 Promptness of Feedback

“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.” UEA Calendar 2009-10 250

Promptness of feedback is the only topic not to fall in the assessment and feedback section of this year’s National Student Survey. This will be, in part, due to significant work conducted during the last academic year as a result of the 20 working days commitment. However, despite significant increases in NSS satisfaction in some schools, the picture is not consistent:



Table M Feedback on my work has been prompt – NSS2009 compared to NSS2008 Top Five School Rises and Falls	
ECO +26%	SWK -25%
NBS +18%	AMS -17%
PHI +19%	BIO -13%
AHP +8%	MED -13%
LAW +6%	ART -9%

During 2009, there have been a disappointingly high number of comments like these:

“Getting coursework back on the specified dates has not happened in the majority of my modules throughout my time.” NBS NSS2009

“Coursework grades are not returned until months later and the coursework itself with the feedback even later still, so often it is too late for it to be of any use for future coursework.” ENV NSS2009

“I am incredibly disappointed at the length of time that passes between submission of coursework and receiving feedback. I have not been able to make use of any feedback while preparing the next piece of coursework. It is very unmotivating and frustrating.” SCI PTES2009



The University should ensure that modules without significant projects and dissertations meet the stated goal¹³ of a 20 working days period for the return of feedback to students.

2.6 Feedback on Coursework, Projects and Examinations

UEA undergraduates are positive about the detailed feedback they receive on coursework, portfolio and projects. The top scoring schools for “I have received detailed comments on my work” were in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities: HIS scored 96%, PHI 84%, LCW and ART 81%, PSI and AMS 80%, whilst NAM scored 83%. However the scores on the same question in MED (26%) and SWK (41%) were very low.



¹³ This action point is echoed by the Calendar 2009-10 that states “In seeking endorsement for exceptions... module organizers should confirm that the expectation is not expected to be required in 2010/11.” UEA Calendar 2009-10 252





Dissatisfaction has been more widespread on the lack of feedback that is provided for exams and course tests:

"I would like more written feedback on assessments. When you do an exam we should get the answers afterwards so we can learn from the mistakes and see areas that need improving." MED NSS2009

"The UEA Law School do not allow you to have your 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." LAW NSS2009

"There is no exam feedback and this would be useful to have too." SSF PTES2009

In January 2009 the Union's Academic Officer presented a paper¹⁴, to the University's Exams and Course Test 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 exam scripts
- C) Improved support for students that are preparing for exams.



The University should introduce appropriate feedback for all pieces of assessment including exams

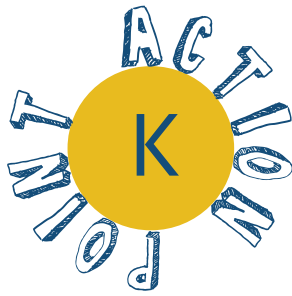
2.7 Timetables and other information

The improvement of timetabling has played a significant part of the University's agenda during the last year. There have been noticeable improvements in many areas of the University in September 2009. However, there has still been some discontent about the late release of information:

"I think it's a shame that though students are paying a lot of money to study at UEA, the university can't manage to deliver important information about timetables to students when they say they will. Many of us have to inform employers of our academic commitments in advance so that we can afford to fund ourselves through university. I think it's very poor that we have been prevented from doing so by a lack of organisation on the University's part". LIT via email 2009

¹⁴ This appeared on the agenda of the Exams and Course Tests Review Group 11/2/2009 and subsequently on the agendas of Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee meetings.





The University should ensure that timetables, reading lists and placement information are published early and in an easily accessible way.

2.8 Library and Learning Resources

The NSS2009 saw a decline in satisfaction with the library and learning resources – this fell by two percentage points at UEA when compared to NSS 2008. The Library has been engaged in several welcome student-focussed projects, such as zoning and longer opening hours, so it is surprising to see satisfaction dip below NSS2007. Many of the significant falls have been in schools in the Faculty of the Arts and Humanities (shaded in Table N):

Table N Top Seven Falls in satisfaction for Library and Learning Resources NSS2009 v. NSS 2007
DEV -18%
PSI -14%
FTV -11
HIS -10%
LCW -9%
AMS -9%
ECO – 9%

Although negative comments emerged in NSS2009 and PTES2009 from elsewhere in the University:

“The resources were not always adequate for the course, e.g. every student needed certain specific library books at the same time and there were limited copies.” AHP NSS2009

“The library at UEA is very poor. Closed for too long over holidays and weekends. A number of books I have needed have been 'lost' somewhere in the library system. The IT provisions are fairly poor too, and maintenance is often carried out at times that interferes with study periods.” SCI PTES2009

Dissatisfaction was mainly found located in HUM:

“The library does not have anywhere near enough resources for History students, from one seminar group there can be 10 or 11 people after a certain few books, of which the library have only one copy, which makes it very hard to get all the info that is needed for presentations and essays.” HIS NSS2009



"The library often doesn't have what I'm looking for." HUM PTES2009

"The library has insufficient book coverage in some areas, and needs to ensure it keeps up to date and coordinates better with tutors so that they have the contents of reading lists before students begin a unit." PSI NSS2009

Student opinion on library and learning resources is very similar at PGR level with Arts and Humanities students and also Social Science students significantly less satisfied than the University mean:

Table O Postgraduate Research Student satisfaction with library and learning resources in PRES2008 & PRES2009									
Faculty	HUM		SSF		FOH		SCI		UEA
Year	09	08	09	08	09	08	09	08	09
Computing Resources and Facilities	58	67	57	58	64	57	79	69	68
Library Facilities	59	60	62	69	68	71	84	71	70



The University should continue to expand and enhance electronic provision of key books and journals wherever it can to allow greater access. It should also encourage further work between particular Schools and the Library when student surveys have shown a particular need.

3. Community & Student Rights

3.1 Housing and Community

The Department for Communities and Local Government recently announced plans to regulate Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs). The plans would mean that landlords would need to apply for planning permission should they wish to let their property to three or more unrelated tenants. The current limit is set at six unrelated tenants. This change would make it significantly more difficult for landlords to rent properties to students.

In a response to the Government's consultation on this legislation, the Welfare Officer commented:

"Rather than improve housing standards or improve community cohesion, in Norwich we believe these measures will in fact work to segregate students in their communities and condemn students to accommodation with even lower standards... The solution, from our perspective, is to educate the public about the benefits students bring to their communities - from volunteering projects to contribution to the local economy, to ensure landlords take adequate responsibility for their properties and seek full accreditation, and to ensure effective liaison between students' unions, the local authority and housing providers to resolve some of the issues that may exist."



The University should work with students and their Union to ensure that proposals regulating the distribution of Houses of Multiple Occupancy are in the best interests of the whole community.

3.2 Induction

UEA students who are living in University accommodation normally move to the University in the final weekend in September. Feedback on this weekend is usually incredibly positive. After the 2009 arrivals weekend, one parent emailed the University the following comment:

"The organisation was truly outstanding in everyway; parking and unloading sorted, clear instructions, helpers everywhere, drinks laid on, people smiling, jazz in the square and even sunshine! It made the whole day really pleasurable."

However, this weekend is not followed by a full induction period. Often students begin to attend taught classes during the first or second day of the semester. Students remain convinced that they would benefit from an opportunity to settle into the new environment before the start of teaching:



“Lack of a freshers’ week meant it was difficult to feel integrated with other students on the course from the outset.” ENV NSS2009

“Lack of provision for Freshers’ when starting the course and living on campus.” NAM NSS2009



The University should use the entire first week of the standard semester for a full induction programme for new students.

3.3 Car Parking

Approximately one third of the student population need to commute from outside of Norwich. These students often travel from rural areas where public transport is expensive and inadequate and where driving is the only real means of commuting.¹⁵ Students who live within a mile of campus, in the NR2 postcode or have ever lived on campus are not allowed a parking permit under the current car parking policy. Students that make a successful application are granted parking on a site located near the Institute of Food Research [IFR]. In contrast, only University staff that live within a mile of the campus are denied a parking space, and successful staff applicants are allocated parking on the main campus.¹⁶

Many students have commented that their studies and experience are negatively affected as a result of the distance between the car park by the Institute of Food Research and the main campus. The additional travelling time added to each day has caused problems for students who hold full or part time jobs, or have caring responsibilities:

“We live 30 miles away and getting into university is hard enough as it is. For some of us it means losing our job because of this extra time...”

“Many of us have children to sort out too & adding extra time to our already busy schedule is not welcome.”

“I do a 30 mile round trip to get to the university and have child care responsibilities that mean the walk to the overflow car park lengthens the time before I can be with my children.”

[Views expressed by students in emails to the Welfare Officer between August 2008 and September 2009]

¹⁵ “Student Car Parking” Student Experience Committee 18/02/09 Appendices B and C

¹⁶ “Am I entitled to a UEA parking permit?” http://www.uea.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.130841!flow%20chart%20V2.pdf [Accessed 28/09/09]





Students have also raised a number of safety concerns regarding the route between the main campus and the Institute of Food Research site, particularly during the winter months:

"My last class finishes at 5pm... I do not always feel safe walking and I try to always walk with someone but this is not always possible. I don't feel like I should feel unsafe but due to the situation of the walk I do."

"I have real safety concerns about the walk from the car park to the university. It has made it impossible for me to bring in my laptop, in case I am mugged, plus I usually have heavy books to carry around, I feel like a sitting duck!"

[Views expressed by students in emails to the Welfare Officer between August 2008 and September 2009]

Since the beginning of the 2009-10 academic year students have also reported that the new student parking site has reached capacity¹⁷ :

"Yesterday I arrived at the University in plenty of time for a lecture only to find I could not park on the overflow car park because it was full."

"Today the car park was totally full when I left at 12:15pm and there were no spare spaces what-so-ever. Some days my lectures are not until the afternoon and I am really worried that I'll have nowhere to park and run the risk of missing lectures or arriving late. Things could be even more serious on examination days."

[Views expressed by students in emails to the Welfare Officer since 21st September 2009]

The University's Car Parking Policy is set to be reviewed later in this academic year. Looking forward to this review the Welfare Officer comments:

"Students want a low-carbon campus and any new policy must be based on a genuine need to park. What also needs to be taken into consideration is that current provision for students is inadequate and damaging to the student experience."



The University should establish a fair system of car parking allocation that is needs-based and that does not allow unnecessary use. The University should also ensure that student parking provision is accessible and safe.



3.4 Public Transport

In November 2008, Union Officers took hundreds of student complaints to First Eastern Counties' Head Offices. Improved dialogue has now been established between student representatives and the primary operator of buses across Norfolk.

The 20% price increase of the Annual Zone 1-4 bus pass in June 2009 provoked 1,092 students to join a group on the social networking site, Facebook titled "UEA Bus Pass Swindle".¹⁸ Complainants on this group have focused on the cost of the service, but other issues raised include punctuality and customer service. However, the absence of competitors to First Buses for routes to the University and the still comparatively low price of the annual bus pass (when compared to other University towns) makes a reduction in price unlikely.



The University should work with First Eastern Counties to achieve improvements in the quality of the service that students and staff receive on the buses to and from campus.

The University has a large number of students that commute from outside the city boundaries. Norfolk is served by a number of public transport operators that do not currently offer any concessions or reduction in fare for UEA students and hence services from these operators can prove expensive.¹⁹

The Welfare Officer comments:

"Students that are unwilling to take on the additional cost of living on the UEA campus, or the cost of moving closer to the University, or those students that live within a twelve mile radius of the campus who are not guaranteed accommodation in UEA residences, have no choice but to travel on expensive public transport."



The University should work with the Union to develop relationships with other public transport providers and arrange potential concessions for student commuters.

¹⁸"UEA Bus Pass Swindle" Facebook Group ><http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=80302875938>< [Accessed 28/09/09]

¹⁹ Student Car Parking Paper, Student Experience Committee, 18th February 2009 (Appendices B and C).

3.5 Graduation Venue

Students have often expressed unhappiness at the use of Congregation Hall as the venue for the University's congregation ceremonies. The last congregation review was commissioned by the Student Experience Committee in 2006²⁰ and despite a number of changes implemented after that review, students still do not consider Congregation Hall sufficiently prestigious.

In January and February this year, over 2,000 students signed postcards addressed to the acting Vice Chancellor calling for a "more suitable venue for Congregation". 1,614 UEA students are also members of a Facebook group titled "I don't want to graduate in Congregation Hall!"²¹. The majority of students' complaints stem from the building's aesthetics, as well as one of the hall's other uses as an examination centre:

"I don't want to graduate in a breeze block sports hall with no windows!!"

"I'm due to graduate this summer and I am gutted that we have to do it in the dingy congregation hall! To which the only association I have with it is the trauma of being stupidly cold in many many miserable exams!... Getting your degree should be about being proud of everything you've achieved. I know I personally would rather do that in a place that is stunning!"

"I am the first person to go to uni in my family as my Dad couldn't afford to go - both my parents are so proud of me and really upset that I'll be graduating in a conveyor belt ceremony in an ex-gym."

[All opinions expressed by members of the "I don't want to graduate in Congregation Hall!" Facebook Group]

Although Student Experience Committee resolved to investigate the feasibility of using a marquee by the Broad for Congregation ceremonies²², a full investigation into possible alternative venues on and off campus has never been conducted by the University.



The University should conduct a full investigation into alternatives to Congregation Hall for graduation.

20 Student Experience Committee 25/10/2006

21 "I Don't Want to Graduate in Congregation Hall"

><http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=61234995147>< [Accessed 28/09/09]

22 Student Experience Committee 06/05/09



3.6 Health and Alcohol

The damaging consequences of excessive drinking effects many, both directly and indirectly. As the operator of the bars on campus, the Union promotes a responsible approach to drinking. The Welfare Officer comments:

“Our bars have a strong corporate social responsibility policy and we have no time-based or bulk alcohol promotions. The Union seeks to encourage a responsible attitude towards the consumption of alcohol. The Union also supports proposals for the introduction of a national minimum unit price in the belief that it will prevent supermarkets selling alcohol below cost price and encourage drinking in socially responsible venues. In addition to changing attitudes, the Union is committed to providing a diverse range of entertainment events that will cater for all students. The size and nature of Union House, built when the student population was closer to 3,000 than 15,000 does not lend itself to non-alcohol spaces. This prevents the Union from meeting the needs of all its members.”



The University should support the Union in the development of non-alcohol social space.

4. Wider Society and Citizenship

4.1 Greening Higher Education

UK Universities have a significant environmental impact; they could and should be leading society towards a low-carbon existence. Certainly UEA students want to see their University doing all it can to take action to prevent climate change. For instance, there are over 1,200 members of the “UEA: Go Green” Facebook group²³ where most posts relate to small-scale improvements that could be made:

“I sincerely feel that UEA can do much more on internal energy conservation. I am pointing not at technology but behaviour of people. It hurts to see when lights are on even after working hrs or to see night lighting at Sainsbury centre just for the purpose of decoration.”

“I live in Wolfson Close and am shocked at the lack of information about recycling. We have two bins in our kitchen but both have a notice on them saying 'Recycling only'... both bins are used for general rubbish as we have no clue which one is for recycling.”

The student “Green Wing” group, chaired by the Union’s Environment Officer, has worked closely with the University’s Sustainability Working Group to ensure that UEA’s environmental research reputation is mirrored in policy and in practice. The Combined Heat and Power Biomass Gasifier, fired by woodchips from sustainable sources in Norfolk, will certainly be a significant and exciting development that will cut the University’s carbon emission by over 30%²⁴. However, even with the improvements made since 2008, UEA has dropped down the national People and Planet Green League to 81st place²⁵. In response, the Union has adapted its “Go Green” objectives to ensure that UEA becomes a beacon of best practice:



The University should further demonstrate its commitment to sustainability by adopting a policy encompassing both ethical and environmental procurement criteria, by signing up for the Environmental Impact Awards to engage students and staff in environmental behavioural change and by no longer providing travel expenses for domestic and short-range continental flights.

23 “UEA : Go Green” ><http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=59203717368>< [Accessed 28/9/09]

24 “Low Carbon Innovation Centre” ><http://www.uea.ac.uk/Estates/news/biomass>< [Accessed 28/9/09]

25 “People and Planet Green League 2009” ><http://peopleandplanet.org/green-league-2009>< [Accessed 28/9/09]



5. Union of UEA Students: Going Forward and Looking Back

5.1 Successes

Over the past year, the Union has received praise from students for its performance. As well as positive ratings in the International Student Barometer and THE Student Experience Survey, it has also been rated as the best students' union in the country in the Whatuni Student Choice Awards.

The Union launched its Annual Survey in 2008/09 and has modified the services it offers in line with changing student needs. For example, many students said they wanted later shop opening hours on weekends and longer opening hours have been trialled from September.

5.2 Planning for the future

Students are set to vote on the Mission, Values and Vision of the Union after widespread student consultation. This document will form the backbone of a new Strategic Plan which will be launched by the end of the academic year.

It is clear that the Union needs to plan its activities in partnership with the University to ensure that services do not unnecessarily overlap and students' views are fed into decisions in an effective and constructive manner. In order to be able to form a stronger partnership, however, it is important that the Union is aware of strategic planning issues at an earlier stage.

Students' unions, as well as universities, need to plan for the changing nature of UK Higher Education. The last ten years have brought a massive increase in the number of international students, and the next ten years is set to bring changes in the way that teaching and learning is delivered to students. The Union is committed to ensuring that all students are offered representation, campaigns and services which are appropriate to them.



The University should engage student officers in formative-stage involvement in the University's Corporate Plan 2013-2016



The University should review membership of committees dealing with planning issues to include student representation at a formative stage.





Mission, Values and Vision of the Union of UEA Students

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.





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