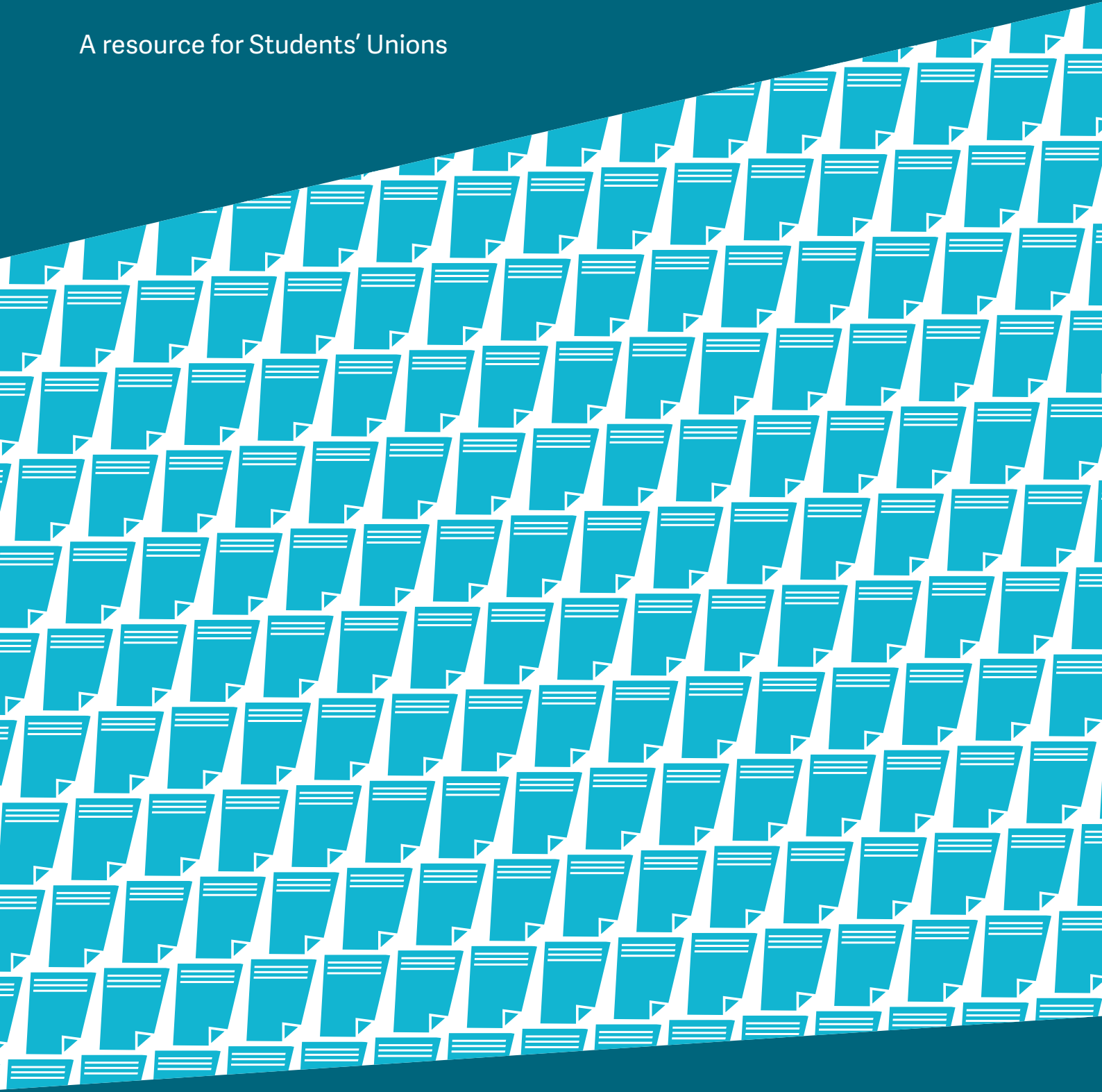


Comprehensive Guide to Learning & Teaching

A resource for Students' Unions



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Foreword

Foreword

It gives me great pleasure to introduce to you our *Comprehensive Guide to Learning & Teaching*, a new resource to support students' unions and student representatives who are campaigning for better education on their campuses.

NUS and students' unions exist to improve the education available to our members and harness the collective power of students for campaigning to change their education experience for the better. Some call this the 'bread and butter' of our existence. However, improving learning and teaching can often feel complex and overwhelming. Often institutions will tell you that things are too difficult, or not possible, or that its students' fault that they do not find their education engaging. This resource brings together three years' worth of work that aims to support you to articulate your core principles about learning and teaching and provide practical tools for you to make education better.

Since we launched our *Manifesto for Partnership* in 2012, we've seen unprecedented strides forward in higher education in developing student engagement in teaching and learning, quality enhancement and institutional governance. We have consistently argued that higher fees and marketisation will not lead to improvements in quality, but rather honest conversations and constructive engagement with students. I believe that the popularity of the partnership agenda since 2012 has shown that argument to be correct.

Indeed, whilst there is no evidence to suggest that higher fees and a competitive sector have led to improvements in students' learning experiences (as was hoped for by the 2010 reforms) and might achieve the opposite, we know that student voice and input is essential. The Higher Education Academy has highlighted how NUS has become central to nationwide initiatives to improve learning and teaching, and how students' unions are central to institutional initiatives.¹

Student engagement is about more than pointing out the problems with higher education courses and instead start suggesting solutions, mobilising and working together with staff to improve our academic communities. This resource aims to achieve just that, empowering students' unions and student representatives to be constructive and helpful voices in their communities. It is not, however, a simple blueprint for effective education. Not all the prescriptions or suggestions will be appropriate or ideal for every higher education institution or course. Just as the market is not the panacea for improving learning or research, neither are one-size-fits-all solutions. Enhancement initiatives need to be contextualised through authentic and diverse student voices.

We need to be more bold, creative, radical and inclusive about how we work to ensure every single student can have the opportunity for fulfilling and rich higher education experiences. NUS and students' unions need to lead the way on transforming education for the better.

In unity,

Sorana Vieru
Vice-President (Higher Education), 2015-16

Introduction

Introduction

This publication is a compendium of all NUS's recent work on learning and teaching enhancement from 2013-2015. As well as being a resource to support students' unions lobbying for an improved learning experience for their students, it also outlines our views on what needs to be prioritised for enhancement in today's universities and other higher education providers.

Whilst this booklet is comprehensive and quite long, don't be overwhelmed. It can be best used by dipping in and out to the parts that are most relevant to the challenges you are facing in at your institution. Understanding the entirety of its content is by no means necessary to being a successful education campaigner.

As we outlined in our 2014 publication, *Radical Interventions in Teaching and Learning*, there are many barriers to innovative, inclusive and transformative practice in an increasingly market-driven system that values efficiency, quantity and short-termism. As Graham Gibbs has argued, a great deal of teaching practice in higher education is determined by habit and convention rather than developing learning.²

Students' unions and student representatives have a critical role to play in challenging the academy to turn its focus on maximising student learning and incorporating diversity. This is even more critical in the coming years following the conclusion of the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF), where research prestige might (very briefly) take a back seat in many institutions.

In recent years, NUS - in particular through The Student Engagement Partnership (TSEP) - has worked with students' unions to advance the policy and practice of student engagement and representation in education. This document aims to support students' unions to go one step further in their student engagement work: to be an informed, constructive voice for students' in learning and teaching.

Enhancing learning and teaching practice is often a 'wicked problem'. It has ill-defined measures of success, a great deal of subjective perspectives, little room for experimentation, and is intertwined with

other challenges facing higher education institutions. Students' unions are therefore vital to ensuring students' best interests are considered in the complex discussions and trade-offs that determine teaching practice.

We have combined our already established benchmarking tools with commentaries on six different areas: learning & teaching, feedback & assessment, organisation & management, learning resources, and personal development.

Using the Benchmarking Tools

You can use the benchmarking tools at a course, departmental, faculty or whole institution level. Read each of the principles, and decide which of the boxes best describes where you think your institution is.

Once you've mapped out your current level, you may wish to choose a couple of priority areas to work towards achieving the next level. The tools are a good starting point for discussions between staff and students about how you can work together to improve.

Make sure you are including the right people in your conversations: academic staff have control over some aspects, whilst much control is held by departmental or central administrative staff. Some practices are easily changed locally, whilst others require a more whole-institution approach.

You may disagree with some of the levels in the benchmarking tools – and that's OK! The tools were created collaboratively by student officers, based on principles put together from research. This doesn't mean they will work at every institution. Feel free to tweak them or build on them to make the tools more relevant to the context of your institution.

Teaching & learning

Teaching & learning – an overview

Is quality learning happening?

There is emerging evidence to suggest that not all students are achieving a truly transformative experience in UK higher education. Overall satisfaction levels and scores for the quality of teaching staff remain high in the National Student Survey, but lag behind in areas defined as ‘high impact’ learning activities: quality and frequency of feedback, academic support and interaction, clarity of expectations, and course organisation.³

61% of students feel that their course is at least in some ways worse than expected, and the most common reasons are poorly organised courses, a lack of support in independent study, and a lack of interaction with teaching staff.⁴ Survey evidence and attainment data suggests that this is accentuated for BME students, international students and disabled students.⁵ Evidence from the US suggests that traditional delivery methods of higher education are failing to substantially improve students’ critical thinking, reasoning or writing skills.⁶ Graham Gibbs has highlighted how there is sufficient evidence to be concerned about the concentration of effective educational processes in UK higher education.⁷

Models of effectiveness

Below are three separate models of effective teaching and learning practice. What is clear is that they are all remarkably consistent in what they prescribe. All lay down a challenge to the traditional model that continues to dominate in UK higher education: teaching through lectures, excessive summative assessment, slow feedback, and students working almost entirely individually. Many student complaints about the quality of their courses can be tracked back to a lack of these practices.

Challenging traditional methods

Biggs suggests that three common assumptions about education quality need to be questioned: that lectures and tutorials are the default teaching methods, that the focus of quality reviewers should be on teacher activity, and that relevant learning only happens within the classroom. Traditional methods of teaching regularly fail to support students to transfer their learning to activities outside the classroom.¹¹

Chickering and Gamson, Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Higher Education ⁸	John Biggs, Seven Characteristics of Effective Teaching Contexts ⁹	Wabash National Study, High Impact Practice areas in Higher Education ¹⁰
Student-teacher contact Cooperation among students Active learning Prompt feedback Student ‘time-on-task’ High expectations Respects diverse ways of learning	Metacognitive Control Relevant learner activity Formative feedback Student motivation Interconnected knowledge base Social learning Teacher quality	Good teaching and high-quality interactions with teachers, which includes: • Faculty interest in teaching and student development • Prompt feedback • Quality of non-classroom interactions with teachers • Teaching clarity and organisation Challenge and high expectations Interactional diversity Deep learning

Teaching & learning: common problems

Problem: *“Students are complaining about a lack of contact hours”*

- There is little evidence to suggest that, alone, increasing contact hours improves course quality or student learning.¹² It is more important to consider whether what happens within those contact hours. Is too much current teaching time spent in passive lectures or large classes?
- If your course is based around limited contact hours and encouraging independent study, ask whether students are actually spending much time on out-of-class work. If not, this might be due to poor assessment and feedback structures which don't motivate or incentivise students to study, or poor communication of the institutions' expectations of students.
- If students are seeking more contact time with teaching staff it may be due to a lack of regular support or feeling 'out in the cold'. Consider whether academic support is accessible and comprehensive enough to ensure students remain engaged.

Problem: *“Class sizes are too large”*

- The rapid expansion of HE and the removal of student number controls has made lectures an increasingly useful method of delivering teaching to very large numbers of students at low cost. Students' unions should query the impact of rapid and unsustainable expansion of student numbers without equivalent investment in staff and facilities.
- Students can learn nearly as much through facilitated interactions with their peers as with their teachers. Breaking large classes into smaller groups to facilitate collaboration can help encourage student engagement.
- Digitally based teaching practices such as flipped classrooms and recorded content can circumvent the need for delivery of information to large groups, enabling course planners to use precious time for smaller classes.

Problem: *“Teaching quality is inconsistent across modules/departments”*

- Effective courses ideally function as integrated and sequential systems, but modular based courses often lead to a disjointed approach, as different teachers emphasise different things. Course designers should aim for modules to make consistent demands of students towards jointly agreed learning outcomes. This is sometimes called 'constructive alignment'.
- Do departments or the institution have a common pedagogical approach? This can be developed even through very informal methods, such as social gatherings for teachers to discuss and share their practice.

Assessment & feedback

Assessment & feedback

Assessment for learning

Assessment is often seen by students as a purely summative process: that is, it measures what they have learnt at the end of a course or module. This is an aspect of assessment that is often overstated: it is possible for assessment to aid learning, as well as measuring it. Formative assessment and feedback are crucial for students to learn effectively, and well-designed formative assessments allow students to practice the skills they need in order to achieve the learning objectives of the programme.

Shifting the balance of assessment away from summative and towards more formative enables assessment to be *for* learning, not just of learning. Frequent, detailed, personalised feedback on where students went wrong and how to improve for next time makes assessment a valuable tool for learning.

“The change that has the greatest potential to improve student learning is a shift in the balance of summative and formative assessment”.¹³

Authentic assessment

Authentic assessment is a concept that is growing in popularity. Assessments can be said to be authentic when they 1) relate to problems rooted in the real world; 2) require learning through inquiry and thinking about how you learn; 3) involve discourse amongst a community of learners; and 4) empower students to have a personal stake in the work they are undertaking.¹⁴

Authentic assessment has numerous benefits for students, from developing real-world skills to encouraging a deep approach to learning, as well as aiding retention and success by giving students some say over what they study, and encouraging peer interaction.

“The higher the level of authentic learning that focuses on higher levels of thinking, disciplined in-depth inquiry, substantive discourse, and connections to the [wider] world, the higher the level of all students’ performance”.¹⁵

Assessment literacy

Assessment literacy is concerned with the extent to which students (and staff) understand the purpose and process of assessment. Linked to assessment for learning, assessment literacy requires students to understand why they are being assessed, what they need to do in order to succeed, and, crucially, how the assessment contributes to their overall aim of becoming a graduate in their discipline.

Developing students’ assessment literacy requires a shared community of practice between staff and students, ensuring that “tacit understandings of assessment standards and criteria...are shared through social processes involving practice, observation and imitation”.¹⁶ Examples of activity aimed at improving assessment literacy include the use of exemplars, peer marking or practice marking, and small-group or tutor-led discussions of the assessment criteria and standards.

“If students are to be effective co-producers in higher education, it is imperative that they are knowledgeable about education and about assessment in particular”.¹⁷

Assessment & feedback: common problems

Problem: “I don’t receive feedback in time to do anything useful with it.”

- Look at the “feedback timeliness” principle on the benchmarking tool and discuss what you could do to move up a level of practice.
- Work with staff to ensure that for every type of summative assessment a student undertakes, there is a formative version with feedback given back before the summative assessment takes place. This way students will have a better understanding of the assessment type and what is expected of them before they receive a mark.
- Encourage staff to plan assessments on courses holistically: formative feedback from one module could be helpful for an assignment on another if the module leaders communicate.

Problem: “I write loads of feedback but students don’t pick it up – they’re only interested in the grade.”

- Review the students’ assessment literacy: do they fully understand what feedback is for, as a core part of learning? As part of learning to learn effectively, it is important that students are supported in order to understand the importance of feedback, and how to reflect critically on their work in light of comments from tutors and peers.
- Consider the format in which you provide feedback. Is it easy for students to access as part of their everyday lives, or do they have to make a special trip to pick up a handwritten form? Exploring alternative formats such as online, audio or video feedback could improve uptake.
- You could consider removing grades from formative feedback, or introducing self- or peer-assessment at the formative stages. Research on assessment literacy (see previous page) suggests that such steps give students a better understanding of the assessment criteria as well as the utility of feedback as part of learning.

Problem: “The feedback I get doesn’t really help me to understand why I got the grade I did, or how I could improve for next time.”

- Look at the “feedback quality” principle on the benchmarking tool and discuss what you could do to move up a level of practice.
- Review the support that staff are given to give good feedback. Is there time allocated in their workload model to give quality feedback? Do they see feedback as a core part of learning, or a time-consuming add-on? More support from the institution could be just what your staff need.
- Consider working with staff to develop a template or joint guidance on the type of feedback students would like to receive. This may be course- or discipline-specific, or you may choose to take an institutional approach. It is important for students to let staff know the type of feedback they need in order to learn effectively, and discuss ways of providing this.
- Consider how well students understand the learning outcomes of the course, and see if you think the assessment criteria accurately reflect these outcomes. Students who have a better understanding of what they are being assessed against will have a clearer picture of what their grade means, as well as how to improve. (see assessment literacy on previous page).

Assessment and feedback benchmarking tool

Principle	First steps	Developing	Developed	Refining	Outstanding practice: Partnership
1 Diverse forms of assessment designed to assess a range of skills and knowledge	There is little variety in the forms of assessment used on each programme. Assessment is not clearly linked to learning objectives and little thought has been given to the skills and knowledge tested. Summative assessments may require different skills than those developed during the course.	Some thought has been given to how the mode of assessment is chosen to best demonstrate the learning outcomes of the course. Students are adequately prepared for summative assessments with the skills they learn on the course.	Assessment methods are chosen through a clear link to the learning outcomes of the course. Several different types of assessment are used throughout the course, e.g. exam, written essay, poster presentation, group presentation, reflective log.	Programmes are planned so that the diverse forms of assessment will cover skills that are desired in the wider world, e.g. by employers. Students have some choice in the assessment methods they are offered.	Students are empowered and given the tools and support to co-design their assessment methods in partnership with academic staff. Programmes are planned holistically to assess a broad range of skills and knowledge through a variety of forms of assessment. Students are able to articulate the skills they have developed through the various forms of assessment on their programme.
2 Assessment criteria	Assessment criteria are vague, confusing and often contradictory. They are hard to find and students are not directed to them.	Assessment criteria are mostly clear and detailed enough to be of use but students may not know about them or use them.	Assessment criteria are clear and easy to understand, and students are aware of where to find them. They are clearly linked to the learning outcomes of the course.	Assessment criteria are linked to learning outcomes and referred to throughout the course. Students fully understand what is expected of them in order to achieve each grade.	Assessment criteria are clear, easily accessible and linked to learning outcomes. Students fully understand and are supported to use them. They are designed in partnership with students to ensure accessibility.
3 Submission processes	Submission procedures are inflexible, complex and inaccessible, usually involving a set date and time to return paper copies to the institution. There is no provision for students to submit their work in any other way, even if they are on a year abroad.	Submission procedures are relatively simple, although largely paper-based. Year abroad students may experience problems depending on which department they are in. There are some access issues that haven't been dealt with very well.	Submission is largely electronic, although some departments may do things differently. Feedback may or may not be provided online. There is provision for year abroad students to submit electronically in all departments.	Submission is electronic where possible, and feedback is provided online. Submission processes are the same across all departments.	Submission is simple and flexible, through an online system that confirms receipt and delivers online grades and feedback. Accessibility for students is the paramount concern. Processes are reviewed frequently in partnership with students.
4 Workload distribution	Deadlines are clustered together, often all at the end of the year. Students are poorly informed about deadline dates at the start of their course.	Deadlines are slightly more spread throughout the year but there is little planning and clustering may occur depending on what modules students choose.	Assessments are planned within departments to avoid clustering. Deadline dates are made available to students at the start of their modules.	Assessments are planned across programmes to avoid clustering. Deadline dates are made available at module selection.	Assessments are planned so that all programmes have their workload spread fairly across the year. A calendar of deadlines is available before module selection. There are on-going discussions with students throughout the year, with the option to change deadlines if necessary.
5 Anonymity and externality	Summative work is routinely not anonymised. There is little externality in the process.	Practice on anonymity varies across departments, although the UK Quality Code requirements for externality are met.	The institution has a policy on anonymous marking that is mostly well implemented. Course reps are aware of the role of external examiners. Moderation or non-blind double marking is the norm.	All summative work is anonymous as far as is possible. There is a strong use of externality, with high use of blind double marking. Course reps refer to external examiners' reports in meetings.	Department's approach to anonymity for formative work is agreed in partnership with students. Any centralised policies are based on principles and allow enough flexibility for Departments to work in partnership with students. All summative work is anonymous as far as is possible. There is a strong use of externality, with blind double marking as standard. Course reps have the ability to meet external examiners.
6 Marking consistency and distribution	Marking is not consistent within departments: some teachers are known to be "easy markers".	Marking is consistent within departments, but joint honours students within cognate disciplines may see disparities. Many subjects do not use the full range of marks.	Marking is consistent within departments and cognate subjects, but may differ across the institution. Active steps are being taken to encourage all markers to use the full range of marks.	Marking is broadly consistent across every student's programme of study. There is an expectation that all markers will use the full range of marks. Guidance and clear grade/classification descriptors are provided.	Marking is consistent across every student's programme of study. Use of the full range of marks is regularly reviewed, including students in the process, and support is provided for staff to ensure it happens.
7 Feedback timeliness	Students receive feedback too late to use it for improvement. Some students do not receive any feedback at all.	Students receive feedback that they can use to improve, but often not in time to complete a summative assessment.	There is an institutional policy in place that is mostly well implemented. Students receive at least one piece of feedback before they complete a summative assessment.	All students receive feedback in time to act on it in their next piece of work. Feedback is returned within three weeks, including on summative assessments.	Feedback timeliness above an institutional minimum standard is agreed in partnership between staff and students in departments. Students receive continuous verbal, written or email feedback throughout their course and understand that feedback encompasses more than just comments on assignments.
8 Feedback Quality	Feedback is poor and does not help students to improve. Often, only grades are provided, or comments such as "Good" with no explanation of why the mark has been awarded.	At least a sentence of feedback is given for each piece of work, with some justification of the mark awarded or areas for improvement. Feedback on exams is hard or impossible to get hold of.	Feedback quality varies across departments, although there is an institutional policy or guidance in place that is generally adhered to. Feedback, although not detailed, clearly identifies areas for improvement. There are mechanisms in place for feedback to be given on exams, although this may be generic or group feedback.	Individual feedback is provided on all forms of assessment, including exams. Feedback is detailed enough to clearly identify areas for improvement and examples of good practice. There are opportunities to discuss the feedback individually with a tutor, although this may not be the marker.	Detailed, constructive feedback is provided on all forms of assessment, including exams. The opportunities to receive feedback are clearly explained to students at the start of the course, and students can choose the format in which they would like to receive feedback. There are opportunities to discuss the feedback individually with the marker.
9 Formative assessment and feedback	There is no formative assessment, and little opportunity for informal formative feedback.	Most modules include formative feedback, although this may be informal and ad hoc. Students may be provided with past papers but they are unlikely to be marked.	Formative feedback is planned into every module. There is at least one opportunity for formative assessment before undertaking a summative assessment of the same type.	Formative assessment is a key aspect of learning and encourages students to reflect on their performance and develop their skills. Peer learning is part of formative feedback.	Formative feedback is considered holistically as part of students' personal development. There are opportunities for students to design their own formative exercises, in which criteria are linked to learning outcomes.
10 Self-reflection and peer learning	There are no opportunities for peer learning and no formal self-reflection.	There is some peer interaction, for example through seminars or discussion groups, available for most students. Self-reflection is mainly discussed by the careers service and has little formal role in students' academic lives.	Peer learning is encouraged and common within the institution, although it plays less of a role in formative assessment. Feedback encourages students to reflect on their performance in order to improve.	Formative feedback regularly includes peer input and self-reflection. Students are encouraged to reflect on the feedback they have been given by peers and tutors and to develop their skills holistically.	Peer learning and self-reflection are embedded in the curriculum. Students' personal development takes account of all the feedback they have received throughout their course. Discussions are regularly held between staff and students to ensure the balance of taught, peer and self-learning is accurate.

Academic support

Academic support

Academic support vs pastoral support

It is common within universities and colleges to split student support into “academic” and “pastoral”, regardless of whether or not the two forms of support are provided by the same people. Some institutions separate the two, giving academic staff the academic support role and locating pastoral support with non-academic staff; whereas others blend the two together in a single role (especially with postgraduate supervisors). There is little evidence as to which works better: on the one hand, removing pastoral support from an academic’s role may reduce some of the perceived burden of undertaking a support role and thus result in better academic support; on the other hand, students may not separate the two forms of support and may be confused by having multiple staff to discuss their issues with.

It is also worth remembering that academic and pastoral issues often overlap: personal issues can cause a downturn in academic performance; and academic issues can impact on students’ wellbeing and personal life.

Metacognition and learning to learn

Metacognition is “knowledge about one’s own knowledge, thinking about one’s own thinking, and learning about one’s own learning”.¹⁸ It means taking active steps to provide students with the skills they need in order to learn effectively. Knowing how best to learn, how to reflect on feedback and how to critically reflect on your own work are not skills that all students who enter higher education will naturally possess: it is crucial that universities and colleges take responsibility for ensuring that all students are supported to develop these skills.

Often, the development of metacognitive skills is provided as remedial support to students who seek it out, through generic “study skills” training often provided by a central department. It is important that learning to learn is seen as a skill to be developed like any other; that it is integrated into academic support provision for all students; and that it is situated within subject disciplines.

“Learning to learn at university means a fundamental change in students’ beliefs, is a complex process and requires support measures that go beyond ad hoc initiatives”.¹⁹

Belonging, retention and success

The primary role of academic and pastoral support is to improve student retention and success. By this we mean reducing the number of students dropping out of their course, and enabling students to achieve their best whilst at university or college. Retention and success initiatives are a crucial part of the widening participation agenda: “non-traditional” students are at a higher risk of dropping out due to a variety of factors. Liz Thomas argues that we should not ask why certain students “fail”, but rather: “In what ways can institutions support non-traditional students to succeed?”²⁰

A key aspect of retention and success is the concept of belonging, which encompasses both academic and social factors. It is important, therefore, that academic and pastoral support is viewed more holistically than as the provision of a personal tutor and supervisory system: creating a sense of belonging amongst students is the responsibility of the institution as a whole, and strategic thought needs to be put into the facilitation of communities amongst students and staff, inside and outside departments and the Students’ Union.

“The findings of this programme present a compelling case that in higher education, belonging is critical to student retention and success”.²¹

Academic Support benchmarking tool

Principle	First steps	Developing	Developed	Refining	Outstanding
Personalised academic and pastoral support for all students	Many students do not have a named point of contact, and do not know how to access academic support. Coverage of available academic support at induction is poor.	Most students have a named point of contact they can contact for academic support, but this may not extend to students on placement, distance learners or postgraduates. Available sources of academic support are introduced at induction, but this remains a first year activity.	All students including PGT and PGR, placement and clinical have a named contact and know where to obtain academic support, although such support is largely reactive and depends on the student's own initiative. Support mechanisms are generic rather than bespoke, although particular support is offered at points of transition where new skills are needed.	Academic support is tailored to students' individual needs and circumstances, with academic support staff proactively recommending development opportunities based on students' skills gaps. Support during transition between years or modes of study (such as going on placement) is well structured and works well.	Proactive, personalised academic support is provided to all students, whatever their circumstances or mode of study. Support is focused on helping students to achieve their personal and life goals, as well as maximising their academic success. Support systems are regularly reviewed by staff and students in partnership, and a continual process of enhancement is informed by sector-leading best practice.
An integrated approach to academic support	Academic support provision is patchy, and each service is delivered in isolation. Students receive inadequate support as staff do not refer them to different services within the institution, and students are often unaware that support exists.	Academic support is delivered by several different departments, and students may be confused as to where to go for help. Students may encounter repetition or conflicting advice as communication between services and departments is poor.	All student-facing departmental staff are aware of the academic support services within the institution, including the students' union, and can signpost students to the correct service for their needs. Services and departments communicate to ensure that the support given is consistent and helpful to the student.	Academic and pastoral support systems are well integrated and offer complementary support to students. The student's named contact is up to date on students' interactions with different services, and their progress and development are tracked holistically throughout their programme. The students' union is actively promoted as a key source of independent advice and advocacy.	Support systems are designed to be student-centred and as accessible as possible. Academic and pastoral support professionals within departments, central services and the students' union proactively communicate to ensure that each student receives the best support possible. Continual engagement with students informs iterative improvements to processes and services.
Coherent institutional policies applied consistently	There is no institutional guidance or policy on academic support, or guidance that does exist is not implemented effectively in the majority of departments.	An institutional policy on academic support provision does exist, but its implementation is patchy. Students may receive differing levels and quality of support depending upon their discipline, level of study or the individual who is their named contact.	An institutional policy on academic support provision is well implemented across the majority of departments. Students in similar circumstances receive comparable levels and quality of academic support regardless of discipline or level of study.	Institutional policies on academic and pastoral support are joined up and implemented across all departments, ensuring a minimum standard of provision as well as allowing for personalisation to meet students' needs. Policies are designed around the needs of students.	A holistic approach is taken at an institutional level to the provision of academic and pastoral support for students, with policies and their successful implementation regularly reviewed by staff and students in partnership. Policies are tailored to suit students' level and mode of study, including students on placement, PGT and PGR.
Staff support, reward and recognition	There is little or no support for staff undertaking academic support roles, which are often added on to academics' pre-existing workload with no time given to undertake them. Many do not understand the academic support aspect of their role or perceive it as not being their job.	Support and training is available for academic support staff but take-up is limited or patchy. Staff understand their role but may not feel they are given the time to undertake it adequately. The lack of incentives results in the bulk of academic support work falling upon certain interested or particularly supportive individuals, who often feel that their contribution is not valued as highly by the institution as that of their colleagues focusing on teaching or research.	All student-facing staff are given basic information about the support services available in order to signpost students. Staff providing academic support as one facet of their job, such as personal tutors, are supported to understand their role and the time it takes is factored into their workload allocation model. There may be an award scheme to recognise excellent personal tutors or academic support staff.	All staff in academic support roles are fully trained and supported to confidently deliver the requirements of the role. Staff are given the time they need to fulfil the role as best suits them and their students, and performance in academic support roles is considered during progression and promotion. Awards and/or other forms of reward and recognition are given to exceptional staff.	A comprehensive programme of continuous personal development is available for all staff undertaking academic support roles, and sharing best and innovative practice is encouraged and facilitated by the institution. Academic support roles are valued equally to other teaching and research positions in promotion criteria, and students are given the opportunity to reward or recognise outstanding support staff.
Regular, structured interactions based on mutual expectations	There are no expectations around regularity of contact with academic support staff, or those expectations that are set are not met. Students are expected to proactively seek out academic support whilst being unsure of the support available or its purpose, and many students never access academic support despite potentially benefiting from it.	The institution or department sets minimum expectations around interactions with academic support staff, but these are often not met. Some students benefit from interactions with support staff, whilst others gain little, as the purpose and structure of the meetings is not made clear.	Students are clear about the minimum interactions they can expect from academic support staff, and these minimum contact points are broadly adhered to across the institution. Staff and students are usually clear about the purpose and structure of these interactions. More staff-initiated contact is common in early stages of the programme, but as the student progresses the responsibility to seek out support falls largely on the student.	Regular, structured interactions with academic support staff are embedded in every programme, with the flexibility for students or staff to proactively request additional support. Discussions are useful to the student and interactions with support staff build on those previous to aid students' progress and development.	Students and staff explore their mutual expectations regarding the regularity and form of contact at the beginning of the programme, and at points of transition, and these expectations are regularly reviewed to ensure their appropriateness. Students understand how their support needs will evolve as they progress and how to effectively engage with different types of support. Students and staff actively engage in the interactions, which are perceived as crucial to students' learning and development.
Proactive monitoring of student progression	Academic support staff do not monitor students' progression through their programme of study. There are no systems in place to alert staff to sudden drops in performance or attendance, and these students may drop out without contact from the institution.	Some data on student progression is available to staff, but it is not commonly used for academic support purposes and may be used punitively. Staff are usually alerted to students whose performance or attendance is of high concern, but some students fall through the cracks.	Staff have access to sufficient student data to be able to monitor progression throughout their programme, and are encouraged to use the data for academic support purposes rather than to punish students. Clear drops in performance and/or attendance are picked up and proactively followed up by academic support staff.	Monitoring student progression is a key element of the interactions between students and academic support staff, and students are supported to critically reflect on their performance and progression. Clear drops in performance and/or attendance are proactively followed up by academic support staff as soon as they are identified and additional support is provided to these students. Staff are supported by an institutional commitment to the supportive use of learner analytics data.	Interactions with academic support staff are focused around progression, both within the programme of study but also towards individual students' life goals and post-graduation. Students are supported to critically reflect on their higher education experience as a whole and how it has changed and benefited them. Academic support staff act as critical friends, challenging low aspirations and proactively identifying areas for further development.
Learning to learn effectively	It is assumed that students enter higher education knowing how to learn effectively. Developing study skills such as academic writing, critical analysis and self-reflection is left to students to undertake without support from the institution, except perhaps in extreme, remedial cases.	Students are made aware in some way of what is expected of them as higher education learners, although many concepts may be unexplained or existing knowledge assumed. Academic study skills support is offered at a generic level and students must seek out support themselves.	Students are mostly clear about what is expected of them as higher education learners in terms of time on task, independent study and critical analysis. Academic study skills are covered at a basic level at every induction, and students are informed of the existence of additional support, usually provided centrally.	The institution treats learning to learn effectively as a skill to develop like any other, and students are given comprehensive support to develop as learners. Active steps are taken to encourage students to critically reflect on their own learning, skills gaps and study strategies, and this is embedded in a disciplinary context. Courses are structured so as to build self-efficacy in students and enable them to develop confidence in themselves as learners.	Learning to learn effectively is built into the curriculum of every course, with formative work helping students to develop into self-evaluative practitioners of their discipline or specialism. Every student is given the support they need, considering their background and previous experience of learning, in order to develop into independent, self-directed learners. Students at all levels, including postgraduate and doctoral students, understand the value of life-long learning and proactively strive to continually develop themselves as learners.
Collaborative learning and peer support	There are few opportunities for collaborative learning, and peer support is discouraged or devalued by staff or students.	Most students experience an element of peer interaction or collaborative learning, for example through engaging with seminars or group work. Informal peer support may emerge amongst groups of students but it is not facilitated or encouraged by the institution.	The institution actively facilitates the building of informal peer support networks, for example by running a voluntary mentoring scheme. Collaborative learning is built into the curriculum at least in the first year through group projects or formative peer assessment.	Students regularly talk about their course outside the classroom and are facilitated to do so, for example through academic societies funded by the students' union. Formal peer support structures are in place on many courses, such as a peer assisted study scheme, and student facilitators are trained and supported by the institution.	Students highly value learning from each other, both about course content and about the process of learning, and opportunities to do so are embedded throughout courses. Formal peer support structures are well resourced by the institution and student facilitators are fully trained and supported. The effectiveness of peer support and collaborative learning is regularly evaluated by staff and students in partnership.
Clear, accessible, up to date information	Information about academic support provision is scant or so out of date as to be useless. Staff are poorly informed about the range of provision available within the institution and may not be aware of their role in providing academic support.	Information about academic support provision is largely up to date, but may lack clarity or be difficult to find. Staff who undertake academic support roles are aware of their responsibilities, but other staff may be unclear.	Information about academic support provision is clear and up to date, and students know where to look for the information. Information about academic and pastoral support services is shared with all staff who may need to refer students.	Information about the purpose and provision of both academic and pastoral support is proactively communicated to students and staff, and is clear and easily accessible.	Students and staff fully understand the range of academic support provision and how it helps them to learn more effectively. Academic and pastoral support refer to each other in and clearly complement each other in the information provided to staff and students. The clarity and accessibility of the information is regularly reviewed by staff and students in partnership.
Trust, respect, and an effective working relationship	This is an important enabling principle that reflects that good academic support relies heavily on the relationship between staff and students, but all would agree that it is crucial. fit within the benchmarking tool's structure, but all would agree that it is crucial.	The relationship between students and academic support staff should be open, honest and trusting. Staff should be sensitive to the needs of the student and adapt their approach accordingly, taking into account the diversity of the student population and the need for inclusive practice. Staff and students should both strive to build an effective working relationship based on the principle of mutual respect for each other as fellow human beings, as well as students, experts, partners or mentors. This relies upon the institution fostering a culture of trust and mutual respect that is genuinely felt by staff and students. For more information about a culture of partnership between staff and students, see NUS' Manifesto for Partnership.			

Academic support: common problems

Problem: “I don’t know who my personal tutor is, or why I’m meant to meet with them.”

- Look at how personal tutors are introduced to students at the very start of first year. Is their purpose explained clearly? Are initial meetings scheduled, or is the tutor just a name in a handbook?
- How aware are staff of the purpose and function of their role? Look at the “staff support, reward and recognition” line on the benchmarking tool and discuss whether staff need more support in being proactive personal tutors.
- Look at the institution or department’s personal tutoring policy (if it exists). Discuss with staff whether you feel the expectations of the role are sufficient to offer high quality support to students. Use the benchmarking tool to start discussions.

Problem: “I don’t feel comfortable talking to students about personal issues: I’m employed as an academic member of staff. Besides, I really don’t have time with all my other commitments.”

- Review the “staff support, reward and recognition” line in the benchmarking tool. Discuss with other staff whether you feel adequately supported to undertake the role, or whether the institution needs to do more to support you.
- Consider a separation of the academic and pastoral support roles. Ideally, pastoral support will be offered by a member of staff in students’ home department, but employing non-academic staff to take on this role can reduce the pressure and burden on academic staff. Caution should be taken not to increase the workload of existing non-academic staff.
- Consider introducing a peer mentoring scheme, or other activity that forms communities amongst students. A lot of personal issues are about a sense of belonging, or students feeling they don’t fit in (see above): facilitating students to form communities is likely to reduce the number of personal issues students face.

Problem: “I keep being bounced between different people and departments and nobody is actually solving my problem.”

- Look at the “integrated approach to academic support” line in the benchmarking tool. Discuss with key staff how your institution’s support services could be better joined up.
- Look at your institution or department’s academic support policy (if it exists). You may wish to consider making it explicit that one person is responsible for liaising between the various parts of the institution and the student, in order to simplify the process for the student. This may be the student’s personal tutor, or it may be the first member of staff the student approached with their problem. This is additionally complicated for postgraduate students registered at multiple institutions through a Doctoral Training Centre (DTC), which are often unclear about who should take ownership for student support.
- Consider the training and information provided to members of staff with academic support roles. Are they signposting to the right places? Is there more that could be done to ensure that students have a greater knowledge of where to go for specific types of help and support?

Organisation & management

Organisation & management

Course organisation, inclusivity and retention

The way a course is organised and managed has a fundamental impact on students' ability to learn and succeed on that course. Organisation and management is like one of the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs: in order to benefit from the transformational effects of quality learning, students first need to be able to access the information they need, get to the rooms they need to be in and know who to contact with questions.

Because of this, course organisation and management has a strong bearing on the inclusivity (or not) of courses, departments and institutions; and thereby the retention rate, particularly amongst students with additional organisational challenges such as student parents, part-time students and commuting students.

"Early provision of timetables is critical for students with children who need to arrange suitable childcare".²²

Vocational, NHS and placement students

Due to the nature of their course, students with placements or other forms of work-based learning face additional challenges when it comes to organisation and management. NSS scores for organisation and management are lower amongst vocational students than those studying non-vocational courses, with particularly sharp differences notable in nursing and veterinary science.

"When the communication flow breaks down things can go wrong quickly. The challenge is trying to manage this flow between three different bodies – the institution, the student and the placement".²³

Hidden course costs

A key part of the organisation and management of a course is the provision of information to students. All information about the course should be up to date, relevant and easily accessible, but a particular area of focus for NUS and many students' unions has been information regarding additional costs. It is vital that no student's degree mark is impacted by their capacity to afford additional costs, and institutions should minimise these as far as is possible. Where costs do

exist, they should be made clear to students well in advance, with clear signposting to sources of advice and support such as the students' union.

"Every year, students find themselves out of pocket by having to pay for extra resources and activities in order to carry out their studies. These 'hidden costs' are on top of any tuition fees and are often not advertised to students when they apply for a course".²⁴

Organisation & management: common problems

Problem: "The timetable isn't designed around students' needs: there are lots of clashes, big gaps between lectures and some adjacent sessions are at opposite ends of campus."

- A lot of institutions will be restricted by a central room booking system that allocates teaching spaces in accordance with set criteria. Adding a human eye to the process can help minimise issues: if departmental staff look at timetables from a student perspective, they may be able to identify problems before the timetable is finalised.
- Some institutions have extended the teaching day in order to reduce timetable clashes. If there are limited teaching spaces of a certain popular type (e.g. high capacity lecture theatres) this may be the only option. However, the impacts on staff and students of extending the teaching day to 6 or 7pm should be thoroughly considered.

Problem: "I can never get my first choice of optional module: it's always over-subscribed and I don't know why some people get on and others don't."

- The process for selecting optional modules should be fair and transparent to students, including the way students are selected for over-subscribed modules. If it is not currently clear to students what this process is, raise this with staff and ask them to clarify.
- If there is a module that is repeatedly over-subscribed year on year, there could be a case for repeating the module or adopting a team-teaching approach to increase its capacity. Similarly, if there are modules that do not attract students, it may be worth considering whether the staff time put into keeping the module running might be better spent elsewhere.
- It may be possible to alter the mode of delivery to increase capacity on the module, for example by moving towards bigger group sessions or more peer-to-peer learning. It is important that the quality of learning is not affected: bear in mind that small-group learning is often more effective than sitting in a 500-capacity lecture theatre.

Problem: "I feel quite isolated on my placement: it's not what I expected and I don't know where to go for support."

- Students on placements should be supported by the university or college throughout their time away: it is important that there is a named member of staff to make regular, proactive contact with the student so that they don't feel cut off from the institution. If possible this should be the student's personal tutor, or someone they have a pre-existing relationship with.
- The institution should also keep in contact with placement providers, ensuring that placements remain suitable and a good fit with the course. There should be a clear system in place for the institution and placement provider to resolve any problems, and students should be clear on where and how to raise any issues.

Organisation and Management benchmarking tool

Principle	Practice	Underdeveloped	Developing	Satisfactory	Enhanced	Outstanding practice Partnership
1 Partnership decision-making		Decisions about course organisation and management are made by committees with no students on, or are seen as administrative processes with no need for student input.	Course organisation and management issues are discussed at staff-student liaison committees, but largely as informative updates from staff rather than seeking students' views. Student representation often feels tokenistic rather than meaningful.	Academic staff and student feedback is usually sought when decisions are made about course organisation and management, and staff and students' concerns are often addressed. The degree of commitment to partnership decision-making varies across the institution.	Staff and students have meaningful dialogue about organisation and management issues in most, if not all, departments, and tangible conversations. There is some strategic collaboration between the institution and its students' union to help facilitate this.	Students are treated as partners with academic staff and are genuinely involved in every decision that affects their experience, whatever level or department of the institution the decision is made. The institution and students' union's relationship is strong and clearly articulated, taking a strategic approach to partnership decision-making throughout the institution.
	Consistent processes	Processes and procedures vary widely across the institution, including within the same department.	Processes and procedures are broadly consistent within departments.	Processes and procedures are broadly consistent across the institution, although combined students may face some problems.	Processes and procedures are broadly consistent for every student.	Processes and procedures are consistent and accessible for every student throughout their course.
2 Consistent, accessible processes and procedures (such as handling in work, filing mitigation, choosing options, being issued reading lists)	Designed around the needs of academic staff and students	Administrative processes and procedures are confusing and inaccessible to many students and staff.	Administrative processes and procedures are not usually designed around the needs of academic staff or students, although some complaints may be responded to.	Student feedback is sometimes sought and acted upon to improve administrative processes and procedures.	Processes and procedures are designed in order to facilitate academic staff and students, and are regularly reviewed in light of student and staff feedback.	There are regular opportunities to develop and amend processes and procedures in partnership with staff. The needs of students and teachers take priority when designing processes and procedures.
	Clearly signposted and widely understood	Little information is available to help students navigate their way through the administration and many are unclear who to contact to find out.	Information about processes and procedures is available, but may be hidden in a handbook or confusingly written. Students may be referred between departments or services more than once before their problem is solved.	Information is usually clear and available, if not actively promoted. Most staff can successfully direct students to the person, department or service who can help them.	Clear and accessible information is available and promoted to students, who understand the procedures they need to follow.	All staff and students understand the processes and procedures they need to engage with, and know who to contact to find out more. They are also aware of how changes are made in partnership between staff and students.
3 Facilities equipped and accessible for learning	Quality/learning spaces	Learning spaces are frequently the wrong size or layout, and often inaccessible. Rooms are often found messy or wrongly set up. Ambient factors such as temperature, lighting and smell are variable and may not be conducive to learning.	Learning spaces are usually accessible although may not be the most appropriate space for certain types of learning.	Learning spaces generally fit the needs of students and teaching staff, including those with disabilities.	There are a variety of different types of learning space.	Each learning space is suitably and adequately equipped to best facilitate the type of learning that will happen within it.
	Appropriate resources and technology	Technology is often not provided, out of date or broken, and resources such as lab equipment or computers are scarce.	Some working technology is provided and resources are often available, but nobody seems to know who to contact if they're not.	Adequate resources for learning are provided and usually in good working order. Appropriate technology is present in most of the rooms and it is clear who to contact if it isn't working.	Each is equipped with the resources and technology required, and this is well maintained and promptly repaired if broken.	Appropriate technology and resources are always provided and well maintained.
4 Accessible approach to organisation and management	Student and staff involvement	There is little or no student or teaching staff involvement in decisions around facilities.	Students and staff raise issues about facilities they are often not addressed or take a long time to be resolved.	Student and staff complaints about facilities are usually addressed when raised.	Students and staff are proactively asked for feedback on facilities and their issues are nearly always addressed promptly.	Students and teaching staff are fully involved in the planning and selection of teaching spaces and facilities are designed primarily to fit their needs.
		Accessibility is not a consideration when planning the course, meaning that it may be physically impossible to attend all contact sessions due to poor timing or location. Learning resources and course documents are not available in any other formats. Administrative processes are confusing and may actively disadvantage some groups of students.	It is possible for students to attend all compulsory elements of their course, although some processes, procedures and resources may be inaccessible to some students. There is little conscious thought given to making programmes accessible to all students, and the response to reported accessibility problems is patchy and ad hoc.	Accessibility is considered during the design stage of each programme, although some processes may be 'standard' and not changeable. Learning resources are available in alternative formats on request, although procedures for accessing these may be unclear to students. Accessibility issues are usually responded to quickly and fed into the next year of planning and course design.	The department or institution sets clear minimum standards for accessibility which are adhered to by each programme team. These cover the format and availability of resources; processes and procedures; timings of contact sessions; facilities and buildings. Different access needs are responded to promptly and no student is disadvantaged by their access needs.	Accessibility and the needs of students are of paramount importance whenever decisions are made about organisational issues. Timings of contact sessions are decided in partnership with students to be as accessible as possible for their cohort. All learning resources and organisational processes are easily accessible to all students, and regularly reviewed in partnership with students.
5 Additional course costs are minimised or mitigated	Minimal costs	Students are expected to pay substantial additional costs in order to undertake core learning activities that are essential to their course.	Costs are often associated with administrative processes. Students with less available income may feel some disadvantage effects and a poorer quality experience as a result of these costs.	Students are able to participate in all essential and most optional activities that form a core part of their course, either through reducing costs or providing bursaries. Some thought has been given to advancing equality of opportunity with relation to course costs.	Costs are consciously minimised or mitigated with bursaries so that all students can enjoy the same quality of educational experience. No costs are associated with processes: all additional costs are to improve the learning experience.	Any additional costs are extremely minimal (or very well mitigated by good bursary provision) and fully justified. No student receives a lower quality education or a lower grade because of their income.
	Appropriate information and decision-making	Hidden course costs are not communicated clearly and students are often disadvantaged by their inability to succeed or stay on the course.	Most essential costs are communicated clearly and students are able to see the full cost of their course. Exams or course materials that were not communicated at application or module selection stage.	Particularly large potential costs are discussed at the application or module selection stage, and fully justified. Available bursaries are publicised, although in a different place.	All additional costs are made clear to students on application, and the bursaries are clearly articulated. Information about bursaries is clearly signposted from course pages or handbooks.	All additional costs are fully articulated to all students and costs that could incur decisions about changes between staff and students, with accessibility and equality of opportunity as paramount considerations.

6 Availability of relevant information and resources	Information and documentary resources	Essential information may be unavailable to students before they begin their course or module, leaving them unprepared and with little prior knowledge about what they will be studying. Resources such as required reading materials are poorly signposted, hard to find and inaccessible.	Key information such as the course handbook, reading lists and key contacts are usually accessible as soon as students begin their course or module.	All the information students need is easily accessible to them before they begin the course or module, and helps them to make informed choices. Resources such as links to required reading articles or to the library catalogue are included in the VLE, which is updated at least weekly and used in a dynamic way.	Students have all the information and resources they need at the time when it is necessary for them to have it. This is decided as a result of conversations between staff and students about what should be provided when, and in what way. All information and resources are up to date and easily accessible.
	Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)	The VLE is rarely updated or not used.	The VLE is used but takes a while to be updated and merely duplicates content students already have in the most part.	The VLE is generally kept up to date, and resources are either located in the VLE or signposted clearly from it. The VLE does more than act as a document repository; tutors use it for online discussions and to share links.	The needs of students and teaching staff take the highest priority when making decisions around course structure, and staff and students are fully involved in these decisions.
7 Student-centred course structuring	Timetabling	Timetabling of contact sessions and assessments often results in clashes, back to back sessions, extremely long breaks between sessions or adjacent sessions in locations that are not close together.	Timetable or assessment clashes are infrequent for many students, although joint honours students suffer from their departments' poor communication.	Each programme is designed from a student-centred perspective, ensuring that timetabling of contact sessions and assessments allows for adequate breaks and travel time. This includes the particular needs of part-time students.	Students can see clear pathways through their programme, with module progression and assessments planned to build on those preceding to form a coherent, holistic course structure.
	Distribution of workload	Little thought has been given to workload distribution, meaning clustering of deadlines is common. Distribution of credits or modules may be uneven throughout the year.	Generally the distribution of credits or modules is fairly even throughout the year, although there is still some clustering of deadlines at particular times of the year.	Detailed up-to-date information about the content and delivery of modules or pathways is available and accessible to students before they make choices.	High quality information, including feedback from students, is provided well in advance of students' decision-making. The information provided is regularly reviewed by staff and students.
8 Selection of options/choices/modules	Information	Little information is made available to students before they make choices.	Some information about the content and delivery of modules or pathways is available to students before they make choices, although it may not be up-to-date or accessible.	Processes for selecting choices are fair, equitable and transparent, and students are helped to navigate them.	Decisions around pathways are made in partnership with personal tutors as part of students' overall personal development plan.
	Selection	Processes for selecting choices are opaque and often unfair.	Options may be changed, but the process to do so is confusing and unclear to students. Students are usually limited to modules within their home department.	There is considerable flexibility to change and refine choices, and students may choose modules from a range of disciplines. Guidance is available to help students shape their pathway.	Students are fully supported to make choices around pathways, including selecting course elements from other departments and changing options after selection.
9 Partnership approach to placements	Flexibility	There is no flexibility to change options after selection. No opportunities are available to take options from outside students' home department.	Options may be changed, but the process to do so is confusing and unclear to students. Students are usually limited to modules within their home department.	There is some flexibility to change options after selection, and this is made clear to students. There are limited opportunities to take modules from outside students' home department.	All placements are accessible in terms of location and affordability. Placement approval is conducted in partnership between staff and students.
	Accessibility	Little thought has been given to accessibility when approving placements. Placements are often inaccessible to many students due to location or affordability.	Some thought is given to accessibility when approving placements, although some placements may be less accessible due to location or affordability.	Accessibility is a key concern when approving placements, and the vast majority of placements are accessible. Some support is available to students to reduce the costs of the placement.	Students are supported by a tutor throughout the placement, who not only helps to resolve issues but actively encourages students to engage with placement. Contact is regular, active and dialogic. Students fully understand how the learning from their placement fits into their course as a whole.
	Learning	Placements may not be relevant to the course being studied, and students learn little from them.	Placements are usually relevant to the course and students learn from them, although this is not formally structured.	Placements are an integral part of the course's learning objectives. Students reflect on their learning at regular points throughout the placement.	Students are supported by a tutor throughout the placement, who not only helps to resolve issues but actively encourages students to engage with placement. Contact is regular, active and dialogic. Students fully understand how the learning from their placement fits into their course as a whole.
	Support	Students have no formal links with the university/college whilst they are on placement.	Students are able to contact the university/college whilst on placement but may not have dedicated placement support.	Students have a named point of contact in the university/college who makes regular proactive contact with the student.	
10 Management of changes	Unplanned changes, e.g. staff sickness, room changes	Unplanned changes significantly impact students' experiences. They occur frequently and are not dealt with in a timely fashion.	Unplanned changes are usually responded to quickly and students' experiences are occasionally impacted in a minor way.	Unplanned changes are quickly communicated to students and wherever possible alternative arrangements are made. Negative impacts are minimised.	All major changes are well planned, part of a broader strategy and regularly reviewed in partnership between students and staff. There is no significant disruption to unplanned changes which is also regularly reviewed by students and staff.
	Planned changes, e.g. course structure, curriculum design, course closure	Major changes that should be planned are although the execution may be poor and students' experiences may be impacted. Communication around changes is poor and there is little opportunity for student and staff consultation.	Major changes are well planned in order and future students' experiences. Communication of changes is usually timely and there has been some opportunity for student and staff consultation.	Major changes are well planned and regularly reviewed to ensure students' experiences are not negatively affected. Communication between staff and students is dialogic rather than consultative.	Full partnership decision-making between staff and students lies at the core of the institution's change management strategy.

Learning resources

Learning resources

The 'support ecosystem' of learning

Effective student learning does not happen independently of external stimuli. Learning resources provide the medium through which students engage with knowledge, skills, their teachers and each other. Resources frame and dominate students' experiences of learning. They are the 'support ecosystem' of student learning.

The Online Computer Library Centre has identified six particular functions of effective learning resources and environments:

- A place to get work done (e.g. desks, space, comfort).
- Tools to get learning done (e.g. books, lab equipment, computers, internet).
- Information (e.g. digital literacy, data, reading)
- Support communities (e.g. help, discussion, expertise).
- Incentives (e.g. distraction-free environments, qualifications, purpose).
- Tracking progress (e.g. learning plans, support, feedback).²⁵

Towards a digital future

Much has been made of the inevitability and potential of digital technologies to transform education. Some of the most exciting developments include:

- Enabling the 'flipped classroom' model of lectures.
- Learning analytics tracking student engagement and formative progression.
- 'Augmented reality' simulating practical learning situations such as labs.
- Video and instant messaging used for collaboration, discussion and instruction.

New students are entering higher education having grown up in digitally dominated environments and expect technology to be integrated into their studies in ways that will enhance their success. However it is a substantial challenge to implement innovative digital practice in a consistent and coherent manner, and archaic analogue practices continue across higher education. Another challenge is ensuring that

e-learning initiatives remain focused on the 'learning' as much as the 'e'. More work needs to be done to support academic staff (and students) in developing digital literacy and practice.

Inclusivity, accessibility and flexibility

Lack of access to learning resources is a common barrier to thriving in higher education. NUS research has shown that books, printing, lab equipment, instrument hire and bench fees are some of the most common hidden costs. These are accentuated for disabled students who require specialist computer equipment, as well as the added burdens that many have in waiting for reasonable adjustments to be approved and implemented. Effective learning requires smooth, flexible and equitable access to resources, and disruptions are more than a mere inconvenience; they are barriers.

Another factor impacting on learning resource provision is the accelerated pace of information gathering that young people are used to. Students expect to be able to flexibly access their learning resources from multiple locations and at any time, in and around multiple commitments. This has led to the emergence of 24-hour facilities. The challenge for institutions is to engage students to understand their learning resourcing priorities and to agree a reasonable balance of availability that makes best use of funding.

Learning Resources benchmarking tool

Principle	Practice covered	Underdeveloped	Developing	Satisfactory	Refining	Outstanding practice Partnership
Sufficiently funded and resourced	Sufficient funding of resources	Essential learning resources are insufficient in quality or quantity to support student and staff numbers.	Resources are provided at a minimal quality and quantity to support core programme requirements and learning outcomes.	Sufficient learning resources are available to facilitate the core curriculum. Students can share resources without compromising on their learning.	There is a clear 'focus of responsibility' for learning resource provision within the institution, such as a learning resource management committee.	Institutions make forward thinking investments in resources and resource infrastructure, linking learning resource needs to strategic planning and prioritising inclusivity and equality.
	Programme design	New courses are designed without adequate consideration of the learning resources necessary, and teaching departments and learning resource departments fail or struggle to coordinate activity.	Students may find 'choke-points' when resources are in heavy use and have limited availability.	Consideration of learning resource needs is integrated into programme design and approval through effective coordination between teaching departments and learning resource departments.	Learning resource provision is fully integrated into institutional planning cycles and is an important priority when devising institutional strategy, taking into account needs of staff and students, and also fluctuations in student numbers and programmes.	There is equitable allocation of shared learning resources across all courses within an institution as a result of democratic input from teaching staff, support staff, managers and students.
Additional costs	Strategic management	Students' opportunities for learning are obstructed by lack of necessary resources to complete work and assessments.	Departments that provide learning resources and departments that deliver teaching liaise occasionally over learning resource provision, but not in an integrated manner.	Learning resources are sufficiently maintained and up-to-date on a rolling programme of investment and improvement.		
	Party in assessment	Students bear significant financial burden for mandatory or essential resources for their learning, such as printing, field research, textbooks and musical instruments.	Any additional costs of learning resources are communicated to students in advance of application and/or enrolment. A small amount of financial assistance is available to some of the students who require it.	All students are able to access the resources they require for the core curriculum, either through reduced additional costs for the course or provision of financial support.	Students may still have to cover the costs of some specialist or additional resources, but financial support is available to most students who require it.	All additional costs borne by students for learning resources are minimised, or mitigated by financial support such as bursaries. No such costs are unplanned or uncommunicated, and are justified under common agreement through partnership between the institution and students/student representatives.
Equitably available and inclusive	Disability support	Institutions are unable to ensure that all learning resources are accessible to all students.	Minimal adjustments are made in an attempt to accommodate students with disabilities, but these are sometimes untimely or incomplete, or come at a financial cost to students.	Full information of any costs of learning resources expected to be incurred by students is given to prospective applicants alongside information of financial support available to cover such costs.	Courses are designed to minimise any additional costs for learning resources required, and account for any potential advantage gained in assessment through privileged access to learning resources.	Assessments minimise potential for any unfair advantage due to a students' privileged financial access to learning resources.
	Equality impact assessments	No additional support is offered to students with disabilities for accessing essential learning resources.	Students are able to access some of the core resources that they require, and sometimes with great difficulty. Bureaucratic processes often disrupt student learning.	All students are enabled to access all essential learning resources for their course, as well as most additional resources for further learning, without incurring substantial financial cost.	All students are enabled to access all essential learning resources for their course and any additional resources for further learning without inequitable difficulty.	A partnership approach to delivering learning resources is inclusive of all students and emphasises the voices of those students who rely on additional support to access learning resources.
Flexibly available	Accessibility	Few facilities contain built-in adaptations for those with learning disabilities, or mobility, visual or hearing impairments.	Students are able to access some of the core resources that they require, and sometimes with great difficulty. Bureaucratic processes often disrupt student learning.	Support staff for learning resources (e.g. librarians, technicians) are trained in equality and diversity issues and can offer first-hand support.	Equality impact assessments are made at regular intervals and when major changes are made to policies and procedures which determine access to learning resources.	Learning resources foster an actively inclusive learning environment for all diversities of students.
	Communicating support	Few resources could be uploaded online (e.g. to virtual learning environments) are uploaded. Limited wifi access on campuses prevents flexible access to resources.	Some students with learning disabilities are identified and supported, but some are not and continue to study with hidden learning disabilities.	Full 'screening' is made available to identify students with learning disabilities and provide them with the necessary support they require to access learning resources.	Specialist staff are on-hand to provide advice and guidance for students with disabilities.	Specialist spaces and facilities are prioritised for disabled students.
	Online access and learning technologies	Learning resources are available within limited set hours, such as a 9-5 weekday, and require physical presence for use.	Some resources are inconsistently available outside of core hours. Some students, including part-time and distance learners, struggle to plan their study around work, travel and other commitments.	Most essential learning resources are accessible out of core hours for at least some period of time.	Institutions run a rolling programme of ensuring learning technologies are used to make more resources remotely available on personal hardware (e-journal, e-book, e-lecture, webinar etc.).	Staff and students work in partnership to agree the correct balance of flexible availability to learning resources.
	Facility opening hours	Part-time and distance learners struggle to access the resources they require.	Students are not prevented from study due to inability to access learning resources around work, travel, family and other commitments.	Students are not prevented from study due to inability to access learning resources around work, travel, family and other commitments.	Providers of learning resources develop specific services and support for part-time and distance learners, such as postal loans, live online access to teaching sessions, and remote IT support.	Learning technologies are used to create dynamic 'virtual realities' of learning environments that are typically only available at limited times (e.g. labs), ensuring more flexibly available learning environment.
	Access for students with commitments	Few resources that could be uploaded online (e.g. to virtual learning environments) are uploaded. Limited wifi access on campuses prevents flexible access to resources.	Opportunities for making resources available through virtual learning platforms/environments are used sporadically and inconsistently across departments and institutions.	Comprehensive wifi and computer access on campus and in student halls enables students to access learning resources through personal hardware.	Providers of learning resources develop specific services and support for part-time and distance learners, such as postal loans, live online access to teaching sessions, and remote IT support.	Staff and students work in partnership to develop new approaches to teaching and learning that maximise the pedagogical opportunities created through the development of online learning resources.
	Out of study (e.g. part-time, student parents, distance learners etc.)	Technical support is slow and difficult to access, and sometimes not provided by skilled or specialist staff.	Provision of learning resources lack staffing capacity to provide sufficient support to students using learning resources.	Virtual learning environments/platforms are regularly used and updated with 'core' learning resources that support students' learning (e.g. lecture slides, reading lists, notes etc.)	Institutions reflect strategically on the correct balance of 'on site' and 'off site' learning resources and integrate such reflections into their approach to teaching and learning.	Staff and students work in partnership to identify new opportunities for developing students' digital and information skills.
Supporting students	Staff and technical support	Information and resources are merely 'provided' without support or recognition of pedagogical needs.	Some hand-outs and leaflets are made available to guide students in accessing and using necessary resources and facilities. Digital and information literacy in students is often assumed instead of supported and developed.	Training and guidance are provided for using core learning resources (e.g. navigating library catalogues using labs, using software etc.) by specialist staff.	Support staff (librarians, IT and lab technicians etc.) are on hand to provide personalised support to students using learning resources.	Support is made available in multiple formats (e.g. video, online) in order to be accessible and helpful to as wide a variety of students as possible.
	Digital and information literacy	Little consideration is given to supporting students' skills when accessing learning resources, such as digital and information literacy.	Providers of learning resources aim to support students to access learning resources. Major decisions regarding learning resources are absent of student input.	Faults in resources and facilities (e.g. servers, labs, workshops, hardware) are serviced in goodtime and cause minimal disruption to student learning.	Digital and information literacy is integrated into enrolment, induction and assessment, as well as with concurrent study-skills support.	Facilities containing core learning resources are service-rich environments, providing a number of outlets for supporting students and their learning.
Student engagement and partnership	Feedback	There is little or no student feedback or representation on learning resource provision. Students' unions have little or no relationship with departments that provide learning resources.	Students are given some opportunities to 'feed back' on learning resources through periodic surveys.	Institutions engage students and students' unions in understanding their attitudes to and use of learning resource provision. Students are asked what learning resources they require or want access to (output-based).	Students are aware of the full range of services and learning resources available, and future developments and plans for enhancement.	Universities create space for learning resource departments, academics and student representatives come together and collectively agree how best to share and enhance learning resources.
	Partnership	Major decisions regarding learning resources are slow and difficult to access, and sometimes not provided by skilled or specialist staff.	Providers of learning resources aim to run 'student forums' to get student input with mixed success, getting a limited range of student perspectives.	Student feedback and representation feeds into a cycle of regular enhancement.	Student representatives are partners in active decision making and consulted on the trade-offs made in allocating learning resources.	Partnership and student engagement is 'value-based' rather than 'output-based'; students are asked what they care about when it comes to learning resources.
Radical, relevant and responsive	Communication	Major decisions regarding learning resources are absent of student input.	Students' unions devote little or limited time to understanding students issues and needs around learning resources.	Institutions update students on planned and recent enhancement to learning resource provision.	Learning spaces are respected and self-regulated by learners (student-owned learning spaces).	Learning spaces are respected and self-regulated by learners (student-owned learning spaces).
	Feedback	There is little or no student feedback or representation on learning resource provision. Students' unions have little or no relationship with departments that provide learning resources.	Students are given some opportunities to 'feed back' on learning resources through periodic surveys.	Students are aware of the full range of services and learning resources available, and future developments and plans for enhancement.	Students are aware of the full range of services and learning resources available, and future developments and plans for enhancement.	Universities create space for learning resource departments, academics and student representatives come together and collectively agree how best to share and enhance learning resources.
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	Communication	Major decisions regarding learning resources are absent of student input.	Students' unions devote little or limited time to understanding students issues and needs around learning resources.	Institutions update students on planned and recent enhancement to learning resource provision.	Learning spaces are respected and self-regulated by learners (student-owned learning spaces).	Learning spaces are respected and self-regulated by learners (student-owned learning spaces).
Innovation and technology	Expanding beyond the canon	Institutions and teachers are reluctant to use innovative resources for learning.	Use of new technologies to enhance pedagogy/ is done by some teaching staff in isolation from time-to-time.	Learning resources help support the development of independent critical thinking and student engagement.	Learning spaces, including libraries, lecture halls and workshops/labs, are flexibly adaptable to multiple teaching and learning methods...	Learning resources actively enable challenge, dissent and debate, and reframe students' experiences by challenging them to understand experiences and backgrounds different to their own.
	Resources that speak to a diversity of backgrounds	Available learning resources limit the diversity and scope of the curriculum to established canons and conventional wisdoms.	No, or very little, institutional support is provided for staff development to respond to changing resources and technologies.	Learning resources encourage and support staff to innovate through training and networks that explore innovative uses of technology and other learning resources.	Institutions take a proactive approach to developing innovative, 'radical' pedagogies through the opportunities created by new technology, such as 'blended learning', 'flipped classroom', and 'augmented reality'.	Institutions enable staff and students to create transformative learning experiences through effective and innovative alignment of learning resources with learning activities and assessments.
Structuring and facilitating active learning	Learner analytics and development tracking	Resources and facilities provided sometimes inhibit student learning due to noise, inaccessibility, underfunding, or being out-of-date.	This final principle is more conceptual and not strictly 'benchmarkable', but runs throughout all the other areas of practice covered in this benchmarking tool.	Learning resources and spaces form the 'support ecosystem' of student learning, motivating and inspiring student communities in their continual educational development.		Institutions engage in innovative experimentation and research into new pedagogical approaches.
	Learning spaces and facilities	Information and resources have poor usability, high complexity and lack of integration, and make it difficult for students to focus on their learning and development.	Information and resources have poor usability, high complexity and lack of integration, and make it difficult for students to focus on their learning and development.	Institutions are aware of how their learning resources are being used by students, and develop their provision responsively in order to best facilitate high quality learning.		Institutions are aware of how their learning resources are being used by students, and develop their provision responsively in order to best facilitate high quality learning.
	Collaborative learning communities	Learning spaces are uninspiring and do not facilitate a supportive community of learners.	Learning spaces are uninspiring and do not facilitate a supportive community of learners.	Institutions take a fully integrated approach to developing spaces, facilities and resources that actively support a variety of learning methods.		Institutions take a fully integrated approach to developing spaces, facilities and resources that actively support a variety of learning methods.

New learning spaces

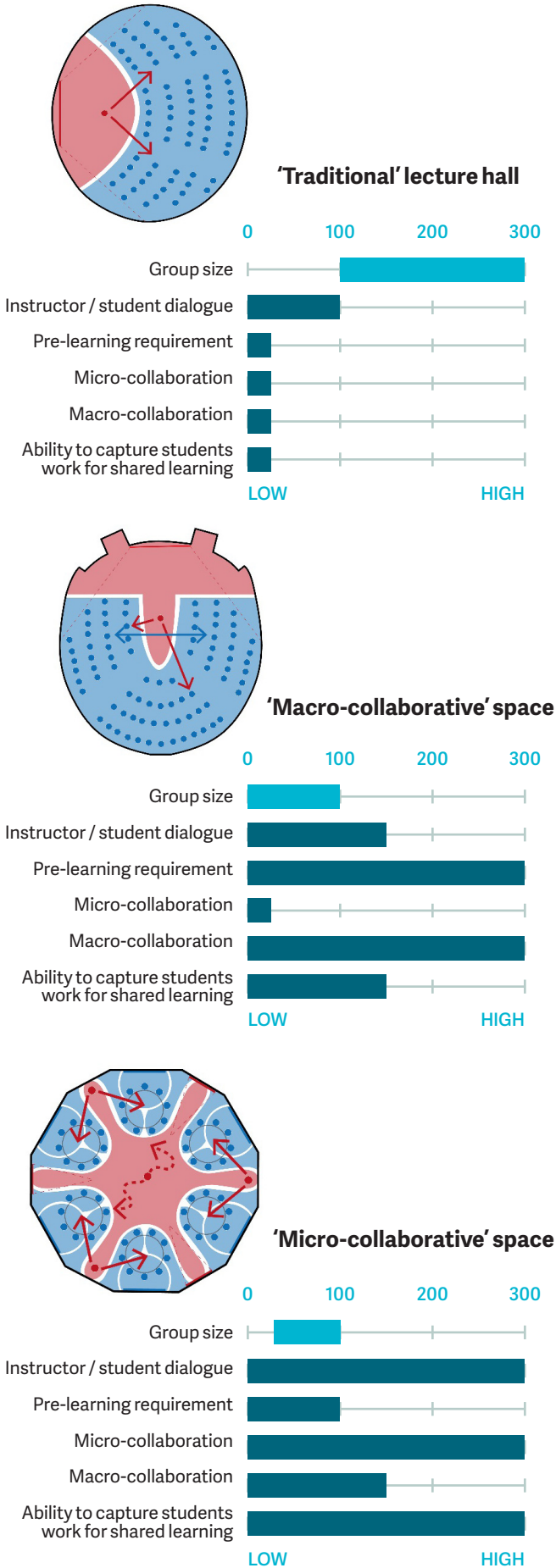
Developing more collaborative and interactive teaching methods requires appropriate learning spaces in which to conduct them. The traditional lecture hall is being identified as increasingly unsuitable for collaborative and active learning, and new frameworks for designing teaching space are emerging. These spaces are designed to incentivise pre-class learning, collaboration and teacher-student dialogue, even with relatively large class sizes.

Source: Faulkner Browns Architects

Learning resources: common problems

Problem: "There aren't enough books/computers/desks/labs"

- Consider whether your institution has matched expansion in student numbers with appropriate investment in learning resources. Even if your institution has not expanded aggregate numbers, adjustments in the proportions of students on different courses or different campuses can lead to shortages of learning resources.
- Learning resources are often provided by separate departments from those that deliver teaching and design curricula. Failure to properly allocate resources can often be due to a lack of coordination between these different parts of an institution.
- Enhancing or expanding the scope of learning resources available can sometimes take large scale investment over time. Institutions often need to be clearer with students about where they are investing in improving facilities and resources.



Personal development

Personal development

Employability and development

With the success of higher education increasingly tied to employment outcomes in public policy debates, employability has been an emerging part of higher education providers' sense of purpose. Employability is actually a contestable concept based upon assumptions about human capital theory and the so-called 'knowledge economy'. Employer groups such as the CBI regularly complain about graduates' perceived lack of transferable skills and commercial awareness.

In this way employability is often depicted by both its advocates and its critics as something distinct from the traditional subject-based academic curriculum. This is unnecessary. The capabilities and skills often identified as transferable skills (such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking) or adaptive problem solving are integral to a wider agenda of personal development that all higher education courses can and should practice. However, often employability is falsely equated with 'recruit-ability' or actual graduate employment rates.

"Employability implies something about the capacity of the graduate to function in a job, and is not to be confused with the acquisition of a job, whether a 'graduate job' or otherwise".²⁶

Transferable skills and adaptability

The concept of transferable skills is contested in research, but it concludes that effective transfer of skills requires them to be deployed in similar contexts. For skills gained in education to be truly transferable they have to be taught and assessed in similar contexts to how they might be expected to be used. This is best developed through more authentic assessment (see a 10) and active learning.

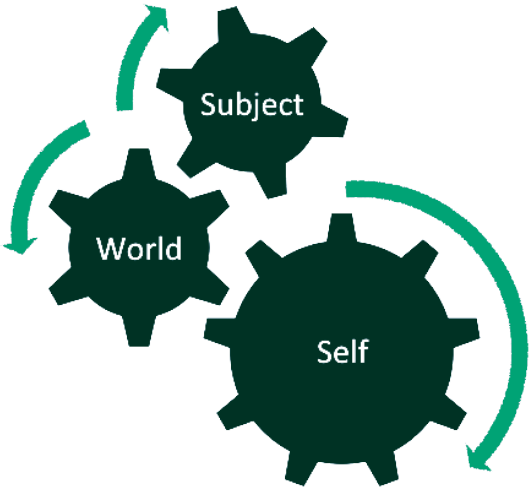
Nonetheless, higher education should also enable graduates to have adaptive expertise; the ability to approach unfamiliar and open-ended problems. This can be developed through approaching problems from cross-disciplinary perspectives and greater diversity in the curriculum rather than overly specialising.

"Employability goes well beyond the simplistic notion of key skills, and is evidenced in the application of a mix of personal qualities and beliefs, understandings, skilful practices and the ability to reflect productively on experience".²⁷

Graduate outcomes

It is vital that higher education institutions have a clear idea of what qualities, attributes and skills students should aim to develop on their courses. Overleaf we have printed our own model of outcomes that courses should aim to develop in students, emphasising how subject, personal, and wider-world outcomes are interlinked and co-dependent.

"Higher education cannot, and should not, guarantee a job on the completion of a course. What it should do is ensure that the knowledge, skills and competencies it is developing are relevant and [and can change] the society of today, and of the future".²⁸



NUS Personal Development Outcomes Model

1. Understanding of Self
 - a. Critical awareness, reflection, and independent thinking
 - b. Agency, self-confidence, and efficacy
 - c. Transferable and general skills
2. Understanding a Subject
 - a. Knowledge and understanding of a discipline
 - b. Skilful practice related to a discipline
3. Understanding the World
 - a. Ethical and moral awareness
 - b. Understanding of diversity
 - c. Knowledge and engagement with the wider world (economic, political and social awareness)

Personal development: common problems

Problem: "Students are gaining skills, but are unable to articulate them to employers"

- This is often posited as a failure to clearly state course learning outcomes to students. More fundamentally, it betrays a lack of reflection upon one's personal learning journey, something that is developed through effective academic support and feedback on assessment.
- Official recognition and recording of skills development - such as Personal Development Planning (PDP) and the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) - can often be a means to support reflection and metacognition. However, it is important that this is focused reflection on skills and learning acquired rather than merely activities completed.

Problem: "Careers fairs and information are too focused on big corporations and graduate schemes"

- Does your institution and its departments have a more rounded conception of employability and personal development than merely finding students' employment by any means necessary? If not it might be worth asking them to rethink and expand their working model of personal development to incorporate alternative career and post-study options.
- The high-profile marketing of graduate recruiters often leads to alternative options being put forward by an institution being left unnoticed. Information, advice and guidance for lower profile post-study options needs to be communicated extensively in order for students to know it's available.

Problem: "Students find employability days/weeks/sessions/modules pointless and unengaging"

- If students aren't supported to understand why they are undertaking a task then there has likely been a failure of aligning learning outcomes to learning activities. Specific employability modules or teaching time are often part of a 'bolt-on' approach to personal development. Consider integrating the content and learning outcomes into the core curriculum and assessment.
- If integrating the development of students' post-study aptitudes into the core-curriculum is too challenging, this might suggest that a course's content, curriculum and assessment are struggling to provide effective learning transfer to post-study life. A more fundamental discussion between staff and students about course learning outcomes might be necessary.

Principle	Practices Covered	First steps	Developing	Developed	Refining	Outstanding
Clearly defined goals and outcomes	Models of employability and development relevant to student aspirations	Higher education institutions have an undefined approach to personal development, expressed as little beyond ensuring students attain post-study employment. Students' personal development is not viewed as a core educational mission of the institution or course. Students are given no support in defining their own goals for personal development in and around the curriculum.	Personal development, often expressed as employability, is a stated aim of the higher education institution, but is seen as distinct from core curriculum and teaching and is only sporadically understood as a goal of courses. Students are assumed to have their own self-defined development outcomes and goals, and are given little support to refine them. Students are given the opportunity to work on development but only late on in a course.	There is an institutional commitment to fostering employability skills and employment for individual graduates, usually framed as transferable skills. Students are given some support to develop personalised development goals that cater to their aspirations and diversify their skillsets. Some students set development goals through Personal Development Planning (PDP) to identify areas for development.	Courses have a comprehensive model for integrating personal and learning outcomes that incorporates but is not only limited to employability. All students are set clear development goals tailored to their needs in both study skills and transferable skills, and can track progress via a PDP or skills portfolio. These are accompanied by development action plans.	Higher education institutions have clearly defined graduate outcomes that aim to develop active citizens in modern society, that emphasise personal efficacy, social responsibility and ethical awareness. These are viewed as a core mission of the institution and of all courses. Collective graduate outcomes are developed in partnership with students and students' unions. Students develop individual development outcomes in partnership with their tutors that relate to both study capabilities, transferable skills and their development as members of wider society.
Information, advice and guidance and support	Careers services Personalised support Application skills	Students have access to little or no information about post-study options provided by their institution. Any information provided is made available late in the course with no connection to development needs. Academic support is not linked to supporting students' personal development or post-study choices. Students must turn to outside sources to seek advice.	Careers services provide some information about post-study options. This includes information for application skills such as CV writing and job interviews. However, students struggle to access industry or discipline specific material. Attempts are made to integrate personal development planning and monitoring into academic support, but are only sporadically successful due to lack of time and assistance for academic staff.	Personal development is considered a part of academic support at key transitions such as induction. Tutors providing personal development support are given appropriate information by careers services, are supported to understand their role, and are given time allocated in a workload allocation model. Application skills development is offered through active methods such as CV writing workshops, psychometric tests and mock-interviews.	Academic support mechanisms view developing the whole person as a core function. Personal tutors are trained and provided with toolkits and frameworks to support students on their development journey in conjunction with careers and other support services. There may be an award scheme to recognise excellent support of student development. Students are empowered to make choices on post-study options and focus their personal development planning based on those decisions, with a particular focus on relevant economic and/or societal awareness.	Higher education institutions provide extensive personal development and careers advice, relevant to a full range of disciplines, industries and professions. Atypical and alternative career choices are included in this range. Students are empowered through supportive information and advice to invent their futures, and can access a variety of sources of advice and support, including academic support and careers services. Students have a clear understanding of the range of support they can expect from their institution and how to access it.
Co-curricular and authentic learning	Work-based learning Community-based learning Authentic assessment	Higher education courses provide no opportunities for work-based or community-based learning. Students have no engagement with the wider community or wider world that is relevant to their studies. Assessment design and content is not at all linked to learning and development outcomes.	Work-based placements are offered to some students, though with limited relevance to specific development needs or learning outcomes. Little thought has been given to the accessibility of placements with regards to location, cost or disability. There is a wide variety in the quality and depth of students' experiences when on placement. Assessment design and content is tangentially related to learning and development outcomes and bears little relation to 'real world' problems that students will face after study. Assessment often focuses on knowledge acquired, rather than the application of knowledge.	Work-based placements are offered to most students, are clearly linked to the learning outcomes of the course, and include time for reflection upon learning. Accessibility is always considered when approving placements, and students are proactively supported by a member of staff at their institution when on placement. Assessment design gives some consideration to real-world application and collaborative problem solving, including through students' experiences of work-based learning.	A diverse range of placements is on offer to all students that cater to course learning outcomes and students' development goals. Institutions have a robust system of quality control for placements and other co-curricular learning. Students are regularly supported by tutors whilst on placement in order to reflect on their learning and formatively assess their progress. There is a strong element of authenticity in many formative and summative assessments, which develop a diverse range of skills and are integrated into work-based learning, community-based learning and enterprise education.	Students are empowered to co-design their work on placements in order to orientate their activities to their development needs and aspirations. Co-curricular learning supports students to reimagine their capabilities and post-study choices. Authentic assessments include a strong element of student co-ownership: students choose topics, questions or projects that both meet the course learning outcomes and develop their skills and knowledge in line with their personal projected journey.
Wider world engagement	Interdisciplinary learning Education for Sustainable Development Relating to real-world issues	Higher education courses make no attempt to present links between curriculum content and 'real world' or social problems. Students have little or no opportunities to engage in their curriculum from alternative disciplinary perspectives or to engage in education for sustainable development.	Students are given isolated opportunities to understand the scope of their discipline within the wider world, such as occasional informal networking with graduates. Some concepts related to education for sustainable development and social engagement are introduced into courses, but only intermittently or through a mono-disciplinary lens.	Students are given opportunities to understand how their discipline relates to the wider world, such as through graduate mentoring and employer networking opportunities. Higher education courses integrate interdisciplinary perspectives into core curricula, perhaps through guest lectures or alternative forms of assessment. All higher education courses integrate some aspects of education for sustainable development and social engagement into core curricula.	Higher education courses have widely available opportunities for mentoring from outside stakeholders such as alumni and relevant professionals. This development of wider world understanding is furthered by authentic assessment topics and activities. Graduate outcomes explicitly incorporate issues related to social and environmental responsibility, sustainability, and ethical awareness. These are developed through active learning methods such as enterprise education or problem based learning.	Students' awareness of the wider world is challenged and developed to go beyond commercial awareness towards social awareness. Education for sustainable development and social responsibility is developed through active learning in social environments, using the campus and local community as a living laboratory. Enterprise education addresses local social needs. Higher education providers offer interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary modules to students on multiple courses, addressing common problems through many disciplinary perspectives.
Self-reflection and recognition of development	Learning to learn (metacognition) HEAR Accreditation	Students are assumed to know how best to document and log their learning and development achievements. No formal processes for reflection upon progression or development are integrated into the course, and students are expected to develop metacognitive skills independently.	Attempts to encourage student reflection on development are 'bolted on' to core curriculum activities, and often appear to students as isolated and disjointed. Students struggle to articulate their achievements in the 'language of skills'. Isolated attempts are made to recognise and record graduate achievements in and outside the curriculum, but with little overall coordination or resourcing within the institution.	Students are largely clear about the expectations and goals of their development and how they might attain them. Students are given the opportunity to continually reflect upon and articulate the skills, understandings and qualities they have acquired through their higher education journey in the wider world. Students' activities both in and outside the curriculum are recorded, often through the Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) or 'e-portfolios'.	Institutions treats learning to learn effectively as a skill to develop like any other, and students are given comprehensive support to develop as learners. Active steps are taken to encourage students to critically reflect on their own learning, skills gaps and study strategies, and this is embedded in a disciplinary context. Records of skills development such as the HEAR focus on the learning outcomes of development activities as much as the activities themselves.	Learning to learn effectively is built into the curriculum of every course, with formative work helping students to develop into self-evaluative practitioners of their discipline or specialism. Every student is given the support they need, considering their background and previous experience of learning, in order to develop into independent, self-directed learners. Students at all levels, including postgraduate taught and research students, understand the value of life-long learning and proactively strive to continually develop themselves as learners. Records and accreditation of achievement are used flexibly and creatively to develop students' metacognitive skills, self-awareness and self-esteem.

Engagement, partnership and change

Engagement, partnership and change

Influencing change and enhancement

One of the greatest challenges for students' unions seeking to effectively influence enhancement is that there is far greater diversity in educational effectiveness between subjects and departments than there is between institutions.²⁹ Wicked problems for improving learning and teaching are often specific to departments or courses, and effective cultures of practice that cause enhancement to happen exist at the local rather than pan-institutional level.

This means that course reps matter a great deal when campaigning for enhancement, engaging with academics who design and teach particular courses. Students' unions need to assist and empower course reps to engage constructively with course developers in issues of learning and teaching.

Using evidence

Having a strong evidence base is vital for making a persuasive case for change and enhancement. Often we assume that evidence needs to consist of a survey showing 'what students think' or 'what students do', but this is time consuming and costly. It can also overly simplify the rich and diverse texture of students' experiences.

Extensive survey data of student attitudes to learning and teaching already exists through the NSS and countless other national surveys.³⁰ This can highlight potential issues on courses, but the real evidence for change can come from other existing sources such as the many documents referenced in this booklet, the benchmarking tools, and other sector and institutional policy documents that make the case for effective practice. NUS can assist in directing you towards helpful evidence, research and resources that is particular to the issue you are working on. The role for students' unions and student representatives is to critically engage with this evidence and your institutions in order to enhance the education experience of your particular students.

Partnership

Just as the purpose of evidence in enhancement is so much more than reflecting 'what students think', so the purpose of student representatives goes beyond notional consultation about 'what students want'.³¹ Partnership is more than the sum of consultation and representation mechanisms, but rather an ethos of education practice that brings students into an equal community of learning and continuous development.

Diversity, innovation and radicalism

It is worth bearing in mind that UK universities have been criticised for being fundamentally conservative institutions that struggle to innovate.³² This is partly due to a 'if it ain't broke don't fix it' culture that relies on the continued worldwide prestige of the sector, and also rigid and complex governance structures. It is also due to the lack of diversity of decision makers, which NUS has challenged in its work on democratising the university and liberating the curriculum.³³ All these are barriers to bear in mind for students' unions campaigning for change and enhancement.

Further support

We hope that this guide has been a useful resource for students' unions campaigning for better education provision for their members. If you are working on learning & teaching enhancement and would like further support from NUS, please don't hesitate to contact the Vice-President (Higher Education) or a member of staff in the Policy team.

Bibliography and further reading

Bibliography and further reading

Many universities have webpages with resources for teachers that can be equally helpful for other institutions and for students' unions. Some good ones include:

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- Oxford Brookes' Assessment Standards Knowledge Exchange (ASKe) <https://www.brookes.ac.uk/aske/>
- Bath <http://www.bath.ac.uk/learningandteaching/index.html>
- Anglia Ruskin <http://www.lta.anglia.ac.uk/>

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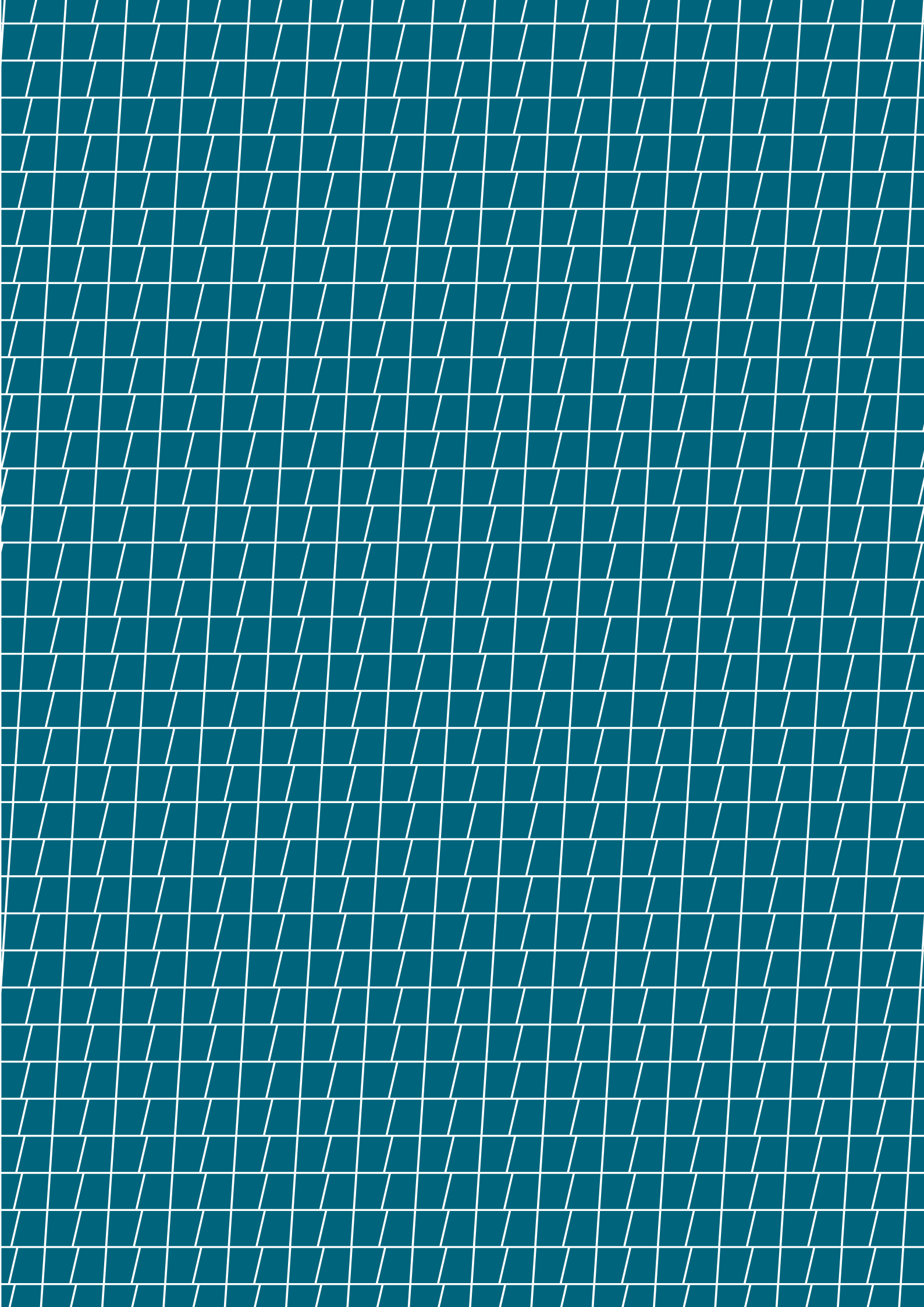
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1. HEA (2014).
2. Gibbs (2014).
3. Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education.
4. HEPI and HEA (2015).
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