

**Access restrictions: n/a**

From: Professor David Bolton, Deputy President and Provost  
**Subject: Student Experience 2020-21**  
Status: To note  
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**Executive summary**

At its October meeting, Senate received a report specifically on the NSS 2020 which comprised (i) a narrative on the results, (ii) institutional actions to which the Executive had committed previously and (iii) a series of complementary local actions at programme level. Following discussion at Senate, the report was subsequently shared with Council.

This December report presents the broader perspective (beyond just the NSS responses) on how we are collectively managing the student experience in the immediate, short- and medium-terms. This includes immediate on-going actions in response to the 2020-21 delivery in the context of the pandemic and marrying up those actions with wider strategic work we need to take forward as part of the broader Education & Student Strategy. The purpose of this report is to:

- Emphasise the focus that is taking place on eliciting and responding to student feedback, and to provide an opportunity during presentation of this item for the Students' Union and Schools to share with Senate headline findings and actions.
- Show the range of work that is being taken collectively on the student experience and how the various aspects marry up.
- Share with Senate the priority work that Education & Student Committee has agreed, and Executive Board has endorsed, to support short- to medium-term development of the student experience, supporting implementation of the Education & Student Strategy. This covers student satisfaction, progression and employability (our education KPIs).

An update on the summary NSS actions for priority programmes from the previous Senate report on NSS is provided in a separate paper to this Senate.

**Action(s) required from the Committee:**

A. Senate are asked to note the paper

The table below outlines which committees/groups have already seen the report and the resulting outcome/action from discussions.

<b>Committee date</b>	<b>Committee title</b>	<b>Outcome/action</b>	<b>Action date</b>	<b>Paper version number</b>
3 <sup>rd</sup> December	Education and Student Committee	Noted	N/A	3
23 <sup>rd</sup> November	Executive Committee	Approved	23 <sup>rd</sup> November	2

## **Student Experience 2020-21**

### **Overview**

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## **Student Experience 2020-21**

The student experience 2020-21 is like no other. In the context of the pandemic, and through the work of many people across City, we are delivering a transformed student experience. Against a set of principles that were agreed towards the end of 2019-20, we are operating significant differences in the way in which we deliver teaching, learning and assessment, student support and the broader student experience.

As noted at the October meeting of Senate, a Student Experience Task & Finish Group was created at the start of the academic year to oversee and monitor the implementation of the 2020-21 academic year. Chaired by the Deputy President & Provost, this group is meeting weekly with academic and professional staff representation from each School, Student Officers and staff from the Students' Union and representation from various Professional Services. Briefings from each meeting are issued by Student & Academic Services.

A major shift in the way in which we are managing this academic year has been the focus we have placed on eliciting student feedback. A significant amount of feedback has been gained via excellent work undertaken by the Students' Union as well as through School and programme-level staff/student interactions. The Students' Union, the Task & Finish Group and Schools each play a role in reviewing the feedback that has been elicited and in responding to students via actions to make changes or explain where and why certain actions may not be possible. The value of the approach we are taking is that we have more real-time feedback on what our students are experiencing and the opportunity to make changes where this is possible. The challenge is that in some instances it is difficult to make

changes (e.g. as a result of pandemic constraints) and more is being required of some staff to consult with students and respond to the volume of feedback and in a timely way.

*During the Senate meeting, the Students' Union and the Schools can each provide some further information to Senate as to the types of feedback that has arisen and the responses that have been made to students to date.*

Some of the feedback from students is related specifically to the pandemic context (e.g. wanting more on-campus delivery) in which we are operating. Other feedback follows the themes with which we are already familiar but is heightened as a result of the context in which we are working. To illustrate this point further with three examples:

- High quality teaching and learning – this is something which students will always seek, but in undertaking much of their learning remotely they are seeking more opportunities for interaction and engagement with staff and with other students. This places additional and new expectations on many staff in relation to the design and delivery of the on-line offer and/or re-thinking the balance between on-campus/on-line offer.
- Timely replies – our students desire timely replies from academic and professional staff to their queries – this need increases as a result of the remote nature of much of their experience. In some cases, students' expectations have not been met due to staff workload, sometimes due to reduced staff resources in e.g. Course Offices or time being spent on on-going adaptations to meet multiple needs.
- Sense of belonging and community – this is an on-going challenge for City as a predominantly 'commuter' university for students and with a high proportion of first-generation students into Higher Education. The primarily on-line delivery mode on the majority of undergraduate programmes and for the broader student experience (the only on-campus facility has been CitySport until the second lockdown) is currently exacerbating a sense of isolation. We continue to discuss the study and social spaces available to students on campus and the safe way in which these can be operated for both the student and staff community.

We also anticipate that students' need for feedback on assessment will also heighten as the assessment regime for each programme progresses and in the context of current delivery and engagement modes.

### **Supporting Staff in Delivering the Student Experience 2020-21**

Ensuring staff are adequately prepared and supported to deliver an effective student experience in 2020-21 has been a vital cornerstone of the university's response to the pandemic and an important part of responding to student feedback.

As noted above, the principles for programme and module evaluation for term 1, noted specifically balancing responding to student feedback with staff wellbeing, recognising that staff are also operating in very different circumstances and having to adapt rapidly to the online and changed on-campus environment.

Staff support and development needs have been a regular item at the Task and Finish Group to ensure that if a need for additional support is identified it can be quickly responded to. Staff support was also a topic for discussion in preparedness meetings with all Schools in September and has been discussed at City Learning and Teaching Committee regularly

this term. This is particularly important if that need has resulted in changes to learning and teaching in response to student feedback.

Examples of this include:

- Supporting staff in the use of breakout rooms to support groupwork and smaller group engagement activities with students
- Offering additional sessions for preparing staff to teach online in term 2 who have not taught online before
- New guidance and support on including engagement activities in learning and teaching in response to students feeling isolated
- Working with the Students' Union on guidance for students and staff about cameras on or off during synchronous online sessions
- Learning and Teaching Exchange in December to reflect on term 1 through examples of practice that staff can use for term 2.

In addition, increased services have been offered to support staff in the use of captioning, student engagement using the JISC system (LEaP) and web accessibility. City Learning and Teaching Committee have been consulted as to the focus for staff development provision for term 2 and understanding what is required.

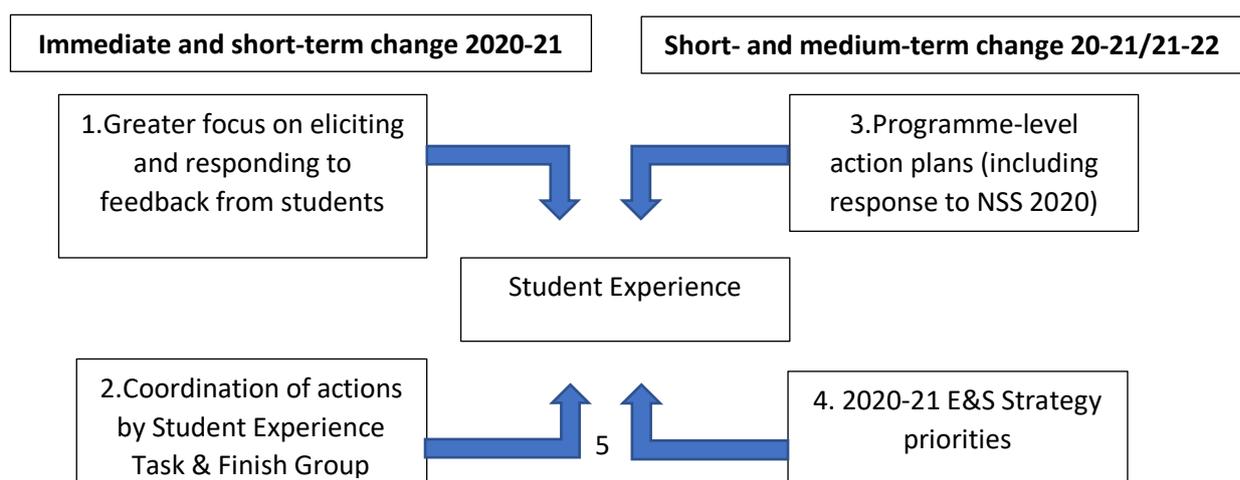
The City Learning and Teaching Hub has been regularly updated as new guidance and advice has been provided to staff, and all Schools have created sites locally where they can share practice related to their discipline.

As well as these more formal development opportunities, key to supporting staff has been to connect informally and provide opportunities for staff to share concerns and experiences of learning and teaching, whether online or on-campus. These have been met in various ways through School taskforces and informal drop-ins from LEaD. This has been important in addressing staff isolation and supporting staff with ideas on how to meet emerging student needs. Staff have also been further encouraged by EB to attain HEA Fellowships through reflecting on their experiences this year.

This work is ongoing and staff development needs will be considered in relation progressing the strategic activities for this year (appendix 2).

### **Actions being taken in relation to the student experience**

There are 4 sets of actions being taken to address the short- and medium-term student experience and feedback that has been provided both this term and across time. Schools are overseeing links between these actions in relation to programme-level matters and the broader student experience is being managed by Student & Academic Services and overseen by the Student Experience 2020-21 Task & Finish Group.



1. Greater focus on eliciting and responding to feedback from students to:
  - (i) Check-in with students as to how they are finding their experience. This is being undertaken in various ways by the Students' Union and Schools as well as us segmenting some student groups e.g. international students via Student Support Services so that we can target specific needs.
  - (ii) Understand how they are finding the learning experience through informal module/programme evaluations established by each School for Term 1<sup>1</sup> and make adaptations to Term 2. On-line module evaluation is due to be implemented for Term 2.
  - (iii) Support students between the end of on-campus teaching and the start of Term 2. This includes the on-line support that will be available to students, in-person support that maybe required for e.g. international students remaining in Halls, Care Leavers etc. and Library Services opening.
  - (iv) Understand students' broader views that will be elicited via NSS 2021 and the view from Education & Student Committee that Your Voice 1 and 2 surveys should continue to operate for this academic year.
  - (v) Inform institutional decision-making via SU representation on all relevant institutional committees and informal dialogue and consultation.
  - (vi) Demonstrate on-going commitment to consultation with students on change.
  
2. Coordination of actions by the Student Experience Task & Finish Group is:
  - (i) Overseeing the key feedback themes (positive and negative) arising from student feedback being elicited by Schools and by the Students Union (including the Student Check-In Report released by the SU on 17<sup>th</sup> November). In terms of actions, the Group will oversee Schools and Professional Services' responses to the Students' Union feedback; it will also ask Schools for a summary report on actions taken (and where they cannot be taken) before the end of Term 1.
  - (ii) Overseeing changes that need to be made to Term 2 delivery (educational offer, student support, student experience) to respond to local or general student feedback. For example, this includes balance of on-campus and on-line delivery, adaptations to on-line delivery to enable greater levels of student engagement, how we augment student support (locally or centrally) to meet the needs of students as they enter a further prolonged period of change.
  - (iii) Reviewing overall levels of student engagement to supplement direct student feedback as a further indicator of student satisfaction.
  - (iv) Overseeing change that maybe required for 2021-22.
  
3. Programme-level action plans in response to NSS 2020 (see separate paper to this Senate):

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<sup>1</sup> The Student Experience Task and Finish Group approved a set of principles to determine the nature and scope of evaluation activities in term 1. This included recognition of using multiple sources to gather student feedback, opportunities to respond to feedback, ensuring students were not over-surveyed and a recognition that responding to student feedback needed to balance with a commitment to preserving staff wellbeing in the light of an increased and very different learning and teaching delivery model.

- (i) The Deputy President & Provost has met with each School senior team to review the NSS 2020 action plans developed in the summer (received by Senate at its October meeting) to review progress or adaptation in response to feedback received from students during Term 1.
  - (ii) School Boards of Studies and Executive Committees are overseeing local implementation.
4. Education & Student Strategy priorities (see detailed actions in Appendix 2) to enable step-change in:
- (i) **Student Voice: Actions that will better enable us to co-create and shape the student experience in partnership with students.** By the end of July 2021, in partnership with the Student's Union, we will have revised the principles by which we work with our students from a largely retrospective model to one that places a greater focus on real-time and quicker action. There are already some well-tested examples of this practice in parts of City (e.g. SHS). We will also be seeking technological enablement for part of this work for implementation from 2021-22.
  - (ii) **Student Attainment: Actions that will lead to a decrease in the degree-awarding gap between BAME and white students to 10% from baseline of 10.6%<sup>2</sup> by end of 2020/21 academic year.** In July 2021 there will be a clear analysis, evaluation and action plan (in progress) for each programme that will be shared with staff and students and will inform institutional forward planning for 2021-22.
  - (iii) **Graduate Employability: Actions that will lead to an increase in the employability of graduates (including addressing the gap between BAME and white students to 7.5% from baseline of 8%<sup>3</sup>).** By January 2021 there will be Executive Board clarity on the direction of the Employability Development Plan (approved during 2019-20) for implementation at programme and institutional level from 2021-22.
  - (iv) **Student Support: Actions that will increase our students' confidence in the tailored support that is available to them and that contributes to their positive sense of satisfaction, well-being and progression.** By July 2021, we will have embedded the positive developments from the experience of 2020-21 and have clarity on how we continue to operate a more personalised approach into 2021-22.
  - (v) **Student Engagement: On-going implementation of agreed initiatives that help us understand patterns of student engagement in order to create learning opportunities and responsive services that enable students to achieve their potential.** By July 2021, we will have worked with staff to embed the functionality of the SEAM and LEaP projects as tools to

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.city.ac.uk/about/governance/legal/office-for-students-ofs> - please note this target is for home full time UK undergraduate students only.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.city.ac.uk/about/governance/legal/office-for-students-ofs> - please note this target is for home full time UK undergraduate students only.

assist with improving student outcomes both through curriculum design and to inform student support needs.

- (vi) **Future models of learning and teaching at City: digital and blended learning.** By July 2021, we will have produced a set of scenarios that explore possible futures for the delivery of learning and teaching at City, taking into account our experiences through the pandemic, responding to the digital imperative, our student needs, our staff skills and work across the sector.
- (vii) **Engagement with staff and students on how they see the future educational offer student experience.** By July 2021, we will have worked with students and with academic and professional staff to reflect upon how we have transformed and developed the educational offer and student experience arising from the 2020-21 experience and identify where and how that learning can build a stronger future for students and staff.

Following discussion at Senate and subsequent discussion with the previously constituted EXCo Student Satisfaction Working Group and Deans, it has been agreed that the specific work on the City Academic will not progress during 2020-21. As part of point (vii) above, we will be instead be eliciting ideas from colleagues about the future of that work

## Appendix 1 – Achievements that support delivery of the Education & Student Strategy from 2019-20

- Learning, Teaching and Curriculum
  - Revised educational offer for each programme this unique year taking account of student views
  - Intensive professional development by staff for design, preparation and delivery of online education and student experience.
  - Innovative and new forms of learning, teaching and assessment delivery to meet the rapidly changing circumstances of our students.
  - Introducing new services to support curriculum delivery such as captioning and virtual classroom tools
  - Earlier release of resources to support the creation of an inclusive curriculum including alternative forms of assessment to exams.
  
- Student Support
  - Intensive work by and with each School on respective student support models
  - Interventions on digital and space poverty
  - Innovations in how we provide student counselling and mental health support
  - Development of online resources to support academic skills, mental health, disability and neurodiversity
  - Webinars for academic skills support
  - Increased on-line 24/7 support through 'ChatBot'
  - Implementation of Togetherall (previously named Big White Wall) to support all students' mental health, 24/7, and irrespective of where they are in the world.
  - The delivery of personalised timetables in response to student feedback as well as on-line module selection and group allocation (MAfS).
  - Improvements from September 2020 to the way in which we can segment student communications to make them targeted and more meaningful (MAfS).
  - Overhaul of student-facing regulations and policies into simpler and more accessible student-facing language.
  
- Student Engagement
  - Improved approaches to supporting student engagement, including the implementation of the MAfS SEAM project from September 2020 and the wider rollout of the learning analytics system (LEAP) during Autumn 2020
  
- Student Voice
  - Dynamic engagement with students to inform our approach to 2020-21.
  - Broader range of student feedback mechanisms put in place during 2020-21 to enable earlier and timely feedback, at programme, School and university level including student big ideas platform.
  - Agreement to progress on-line module evaluation during 2020-21.

Our response to the pandemic has enabled us to expediate some plans to improve the education and student experience as well as rethink traditional approaches which will undoubtedly be developed in the longer term. The impact of these developments on the

2020-21 education offer and student experience is now being tested. We will build upon those that are proving successful, and adapt where needs be in the context of a continued uncertain environment both globally and in the context of City.

## Appendix 2 – Detailed actions against each Education & Student Strategy priority 2020-21

### 1. Student Voice: Actions that will better enable us to co-create and shape the student experience in partnership with students

By the end of July 2021, in partnership with the Student's Union, we will have revised the way in which we work with our students from a largely retrospective to a more real-time model. This means:

- Partnering with students on actions in 2020-21 and planning for 2021-22.
- During 2020-21, implementing more frequent, real time and regular sessions with students in favour of retrospective surveys and formal committees.
- A review of our strategic approach to student feedback for 2021-22 implementation, using experience from 2020-21, listening to what our students need and building upon existing good practice. This work to include how we communicate with students about awareness of opportunities to feedback and actions taken to improve the student experience.
- Assessing technological platforms that could enable us to improve our approach to the actions above, including business case to Strategy, Planning and Resources Board if needed.
- Implementing on-line module evaluation during 2020-21 (project in progress).

This work will be overseen by Education & Student Committee (establishing a T&F group if needed), partnering with the Students' Union and its respective governance.

### 2. Student Attainment: Actions that will lead to a decrease in the degree-awarding gap between BAME and white students to 10% from baseline of 10.6%<sup>4</sup> by end of 2020/21 academic year.

By end of July 2021 there will be a clear analysis, evaluation and action plan (in progress) for each programme that will be shared with staff and students and institutional forward planning in place for 2021-22. This means:

- Partnering with students on all actions will be in place.
- The inclusive curriculum framework continues to be embedded and x% of programmes have put it into practice impacted xx students.<sup>5</sup>
- Increased provision of resources to support decolonisation of City, including the curriculum and the library.
- Provision of greater information to staff on the make-up and needs of the student body and how to respond to them.
- A revised programme of staff development around inclusive learning and teaching practice will be in place that will support staff.
- Staff are more confident with applying inclusive curriculum principles and championing equality as a result of attending a programme of training, workshops, network membership and events and partnering with students.
- Best practice is shared across City to inform on-going plans for 2021-22 through forums to be developed during the coming months.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.city.ac.uk/about/governance/legal/office-for-students-ofs> - please note this target is for home full time UK undergraduate students only.

<sup>5</sup> % will be added following further discussions with Schools.

This work will be overseen by the Student Attainment Working Group, partnering with the Network for Racial Justice and the Students' Union. It will also feed into the REC Action Plan. Schools will be responsible for overseeing programme actions.

### **3. Graduate Employability: Actions that will lead to an increase in the employability of graduates (including addressing the gap between black and white students).**

By January 2021 there will be Executive Board clarity on the direction of the Employability Development Plan (approved during 2019-20) for implementation at programme and institutional level from 2021-22. This means:

- Partnering with students on strategic direction will be in place.
- EDP is reviewed in the context of pandemic and post-pandemic thinking including declines in the labour market, increasing student confidence and the balance of support required for students and for graduates and areas of inequality.
- Agreement on how the EDP will be resourced and developed for initial implementation from September 2021.
- In tandem, progress on-going strategic work for current students and graduates during 2020-21 that aims to support graduate outcomes in the pandemic context.
- Partner with the Students' Union on initiatives it is progressing to support students' employability.

This work will be overseen by Education & Student Committee, partnering with the Network for Racial Justice and the Students' Union. Investment proposals will be submitted from ESC to Strategy Planning and Investment Board and Executive Board (as required). The Graduate Outcomes Working Group will feed into this work.

### **4. Student Support: Actions that will increase our students' confidence in the tailored support that is available to them and that contributes to their positive sense of satisfaction, well-being and progression.**

By July 2021, we will have embedded the positive developments from the experience of 2020-21 and have clarity on how we continue to operate a more personalised approach into 2021-22. This means:

- Ensuring appropriate and consistent support being available to our students throughout 2020-21 via:
  - (i) the models agreed by each School and to keep these under review in response to students' needs and University policy, including on Personal Tutoring and associated support needs for those staff.
  - (ii) specialist support in relation to students' mental health.
  - (iii) Reviewing any changing resourcing needs to maintain this commitment in an environment where students' needs are constantly changing.
- Working in partnership with our students to understand more about what they need and don't need from us within our developing models.
- Work with students to understand the impact of the pandemic longer term on support needs including tailored support for mental health needs
- Progressing the work to balance the role of Personal Tutors, Student Welfare Officers and specialist Student Support Services so that we have coordinated resources and expertise to best support our students.

- Establishing training, support and guidance for staff based on their needs.
- Creating a service level evaluation plan for each specialist Student Support Service to be transparent about inputs and outputs (also a commitment in our Access & Participation Plan).
- Through Strategy Planning and Resources Board, consider the CRM business case for improved support and triaging of our students.
- Completing the implementation of Personalised Timetables for all students (MAfS)
- Evaluating the implementation of the new segmentation approach to student communications through partnership with the student body.

This work will be overseen by Education & Student Committee, partnering with the Students' Union.

**5. Student Engagement: On-going implementation of agreed initiatives that help us understand patterns of student engagement in order to create learning opportunities and responsive services that enable students to achieve their potential.**

By July 2021, we will have worked with staff to embed the functionality of the SEAM and LEaP projects as tools to assist with improving student outcomes both through curriculum design and support interventions.

This means:

- identify students on all taught programmes who may be struggling to engage with their studies and act on this to proactively offer support in order for them to continue (retain and progress)
- identify and support students who may be able to make greater achievements with some targeted support
- to evaluate and analyse data collected to inform student support and programme design to improve student outcomes for all – continuation, attainment and progression – particularly in relation to new modes of delivery and engagement. This therefore includes work to provide further opportunities for students on boundary cusps to be supported on achieving good (higher) degree outcomes.
- To evaluate and report on School student engagement plans to inform City Student Support Model (including the role of Personal Tutoring) to improve continuation and to inform Student Attainment Project work for 2020-21

**6. Future models of learning and teaching at City: digital and blended learning**

By July 2021, we will have produced a set of scenarios that explore possible futures for the delivery of learning and teaching at City, taking into account our experiences through the pandemic, responding to the digital imperative, our student needs, our staff skills and work across the sector. This means:

- Collating data from the experience of online learning during the pandemic from both staff and students, including using data from Student Attainment Project on our student body ("know your students" possible campaign under discussion) and the impact of the pandemic on student learning, as well as the development of staff skills.
- Collaborative working with Schools and professional services to understand current thinking and changes to learning and teaching models
- Collecting examples of current practice from City and across the sector
- Working with the CSU on recommendations from the SUMS report

- Building a set of possible scenarios and testing this with staff and students via focus groups.
- Recommendations on how to embed these in future strategic direction for City.

This work will be overseen by City Learning and Teaching Committee.

#### **7. Engagement with staff and students on how they see the future educational offer student experience.**

By July 2021, we will have worked with students and with academic and professional staff to reflect upon how we have transformed and developed the educational offer and student experience arising from the 2020-21 experience and identify where and how that learning can build a stronger future for students and staff. This means:

- Working in partnership with the Students' Union to develop an engagement approach with the student body to understand what we might (and might not) take forward to best support students' futures.
- Work with academic and professional staff to gauge their reflections on 2020-21 and views about the future in relation to the delivery of the educational offer and student experience.
- Providing a report, including to Senate, the Executive Board, the SU Board of Trustees and Council.
- Building the findings into broader strategic discussions within City, including those which may be beneficial for the incoming President and SU President.
- Building agreed actions into Education & Student Strategy prioritisation.

This work will be overseen by Education & Student Committee.