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**ACADEMIC REVIEW 2019**

A Students’ Union review of the 2018-19 academic year.

**CONTENTS**

[MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS 4](#_Toc24551743)

[INTRODUCTION 6](#_Toc24551744)

[NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 7](#_Toc24551745)

[Overall Satisfaction 7](#_Toc24551746)

[Scale Satisfaction 8](#_Toc24551747)

[Individual Scales 9](#_Toc24551748)

[Individual Questions 12](#_Toc24551749)

[Satisfaction by Demographics 12](#_Toc24551750)

[Age 12](#_Toc24551751)

[Disability 13](#_Toc24551752)

[Domicile 15](#_Toc24551753)

[Ethnicity 18](#_Toc24551754)

[Mode of Study 19](#_Toc24551755)

[POLAR 21](#_Toc24551756)

[Satisfaction by Faculty 23](#_Toc24551757)

[FAST 24](#_Toc24551758)

[FBL 25](#_Toc24551759)

[FEH 26](#_Toc24551760)

[FHS 28](#_Toc24551761)

[EWO 29](#_Toc24551762)

[Satisfaction by Programme 31](#_Toc24551763)

[FAST Programmes 33](#_Toc24551764)

[FBL Programmes 45](#_Toc24551765)

[FEH Programmes 57](#_Toc24551766)

[FHS Programmes 67](#_Toc24551767)

[Student Comments 90](#_Toc24551768)

[Office for Students Priorities 92](#_Toc24551769)

[Continuation Rates 92](#_Toc24551770)

[Wellbeing and Mental Health 96](#_Toc24551771)

[Grade Inflation 100](#_Toc24551772)

[Academic Misconduct 103](#_Toc24551773)

[Access and Participation 108](#_Toc24551774)

[Anonymous Marking 112](#_Toc24551775)

[Good Degrees (Non-Disabled and Disabled Students) 115](#_Toc24551776)

[Augar Review 117](#_Toc24551777)

[Summary 119](#_Toc24551778)

# MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Given the huge investment in the IT network (the largest across European institutions), an NSS-recovery action plan should be introduced to improve the score going forward, including how to market IT to students and additional training requirements for staff. In addition, the Digital Capabilities Survey should be re-run. Furthermore, a ping metric should be introduced, highlighting the quality of the internet connection at locations across campus, with this information being communicated on digital screens. The Students’ Union Elected Officers have committed to holding an information session for students regarding I.T and how to log tickets in the event of experiencing drops in connectivity. This will help spread awareness and help inform I.T Services of any potential problem areas.
2. Following the move to Waterside at the start of the year, there were initially problems with timetabling, resulting in large cohorts finding themselves placed in small rooms. Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes. In addition, the staff email policy needs to be reintroduced and enforced.
3. With the uncertainty over Brexit and the increasing possibility of the UK leaving the European Union under a no-deal scenario, it is important that lecturers communicate with students on the matter. To this end, Universities UK have produced a helpful fact-file for EU students: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/brexit/Documents/eu-student-faq.pdf>. The University should consider any difference in induction between international and EU students. Further, the position of EU Officer at the Students’ Union is currently vacant and needs to be filled quickly.
4. With the level of student complaints regarding the sports facilities, it would be advised to keep students that are being taught on sports programmes of any updates regarding the Sports Dome. This communication should also filter through to the Students’ Union, so they can disseminate the information to their affiliated sports clubs. The potential implications for future NSS scores for these students are high, given the high level of negative feedback the Students’ Union have been receiving.
5. Discussions on parking remain high this year, despite changes made early on to accommodate students. It would be helpful for the University to communicate the provision of after hour parking in Car Park 1 and keep students informed of any potential changes that have happened, or are due to happen. History suggests that so long as students are aware, they are accommodating on the whole of any such changes.
6. It would be beneficial for the Students’ Union to be given the minutes of SSLC’S so that we can begin to look at the process and whether there are any patterns emerging from them that need evaluating on a broader level. Furthermore, we have had some incidences of students reporting that they feel that feedback is not worked on during these SSLC’s and their student voice is not valuable. It will also enable us to share and celebrate good practice among the programme leaders in order to exact progress in this area.
7. “Community feel” is a reoccurring theme throughout the NSS data. For those courses who have not already considered them, or have them currently in place, Academic societies are an invaluable way to help forge a community both within and across cohorts. Academic societies enable cohesion between year groups and enable to students to socialise and further explore their subject area in theor own way. Furthermore, they afford students key employability and life skills when becoming part of a committee that will have a positive impact on graduate outcomes.
8. There are continuous recommendations from students in favour of anonymous marking to be facilitated across the University. The students’ survey will be relaunched and the results will be analysed and used to form the overall student consensus on whether they feel the University needs to develop and embed an anonymous marking policy where appropriate.

# INTRODUCTION

Following the release of this year’s National Student Survey (NSS) results in July, the Academic Review 2019 compares the University of Northampton’s overall satisfaction score with the sector, before considering the statistics for individual scales within the last three years. The data is then examined further by demographics (including disability, domicile and ethnicity) and for each faculty.

A significant part of the Review is an analysis of NSS satisfaction by programme. NSS results for a course with less than ten respondents are not published, meaning that 57 programmes are scrutinised here. Each contrasts approval across scales for the last two years, as well as for the whole University in 2019, with reference to the University’s thresholds and targets being made. Where available, comments from respondents are included to elucidate the positives and negatives, while reference is made to other data sources (such as course demographics, graduate employment and withdrawal rates). More general comments are also subsequently outlined.

The Northampton perspective on the current priorities for the Office for Students (OfS) is then given. Here, we contemplate continuation rates by faculty and demographics, the research conducted by the OfS on ‘unexplained’ grade inflation, referrals for academic misconduct/how to combat essay-writing services and the recent rise in the percentage of unconditional offers. Furthermore, there is an analysis of the wellbeing questions from this year’s Student Academic Experience Survey (run by Advance HE and the Higher Education Policy Institute).

We then turn to the OfS’s own targets for access and participation, and apply these to Northampton. Together with studying entry rates for the most and least represented groups, and awards of good degrees to non-disabled and disabled students, much of this section is dedicated to the BAME attainment gap at Northampton. Indeed, last year’s Academic Review recommended an institution-wide introduction of anonymous marking, where possible, and comments made in a Students’ Union survey on the topic (and more broadly about assessment and feedback) are presented here. In addition, research on how anonymous marking is deployed elsewhere is referenced.

The Academic Review concludes by observing the main recommendations posited by the Augar Review on post-18 education and funding, as well as reaction from relevant parties.

# NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

This is now the third year of the NSS being run since its change of format in 2017, enabling data trends to be analysed over a longer period. We begin by contemplating satisfaction at the University of Northampton, both overall and for the main scales.

NB. Throughout the review, the difference between two measures is defined as the first measure minus the second measure.

## Overall Satisfaction

The University’s main course satisfaction statistic (81%) has now dropped by just over two percentage points (ppts) since 2017. When examining responses, there has been a marginal fall (1.5 ppts) in those survey members definitely agreeing between 2019 and 2018, coupled with a germane rise in ‘neither’ answers.

Moreover, Northampton’s decrease is not commensurate with the sector, whose figure negligibly rose (by 0.2 ppts) from last year. Meanwhile, we can consider the University’s figure against the Office for Students’ benchmark data, whose adjusted data score[[1]](#footnote-1) states that the University should be performing at 83%. Although the discrepancy between the actual and benchmark scores is not significantly different[[2]](#footnote-2), the University’s figure is now further from the benchmark than in 2018. This is something which needs to be closely monitored, particularly since the University’s target satisfaction score for 2019-20 is 90%.[[3]](#footnote-3)

It is also worthwhile to scrutinise Northampton’s performance against its comparator providers (as listed in the chart below). Interestingly, the score of only one institution (Wolverhampton) has increased since 2018 (conflicting with the picture from the whole sector). A mini-collapse in Bedfordshire’s statistic (by three ppts) has resulted in Northampton no longer having the worst satisfaction score among these 13 institutions.

## Scale Satisfaction

We now focus solely on Northampton. The NSS is split into nine main ‘scales’. From 2018, the scores of all but one scale (student voice) have descended (and, in fact, stand at three-year lows) – indeed, satisfaction with learning resources and the Students’ Union has plummeted by seven and six ppts respectively. It is disheartening to see that prior gains in scales such as assessment and feedback, academic support and learning community have now disappeared.

Each of the nine scales has its own OfS benchmark. In 2018, two scales (assessment and feedback, and learning community) were above their respective benchmarks – in a *volte-face*, all scales are now not performing as would be expected. In this chart, hashed bars show scores that are significantly under the benchmark, with organisation and management, as well as the Students’ Union, now dropping into this category. In addition, the statistic for learning resources, already below par, has deteriorated still further (by seven ppts).

## Individual Scales

Questions from some of these scales are now inspected in more detail.

For learning resources, the scores from all three questions have not only nosedived from 2018, but are now significantly below the OfS’s benchmarks (previously, only the library resources statistic was not significant).

Surely the most alarming aspect here is the statistic for the support provided by IT (Q18), which currently stands 19 ppts adrift of the benchmark (and has fallen by 12 ppts since 2017). Indeed, the situation is so concerning that, when excluding colleges, schools and specialist providers, both Northampton’s IT figure and discrepancy from its benchmark are the second-worst performances out of all main University providers in the UK (with only Richmond of a lower standard).[[4]](#footnote-4) Something dramatic would now need to happen to attain next year’s University-set target of 83%.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Given the huge investment in the IT network (the largest across European institutions), an NSS-recovery action plan should be introduced to improve the score going forward, including how to market IT to students and additional training requirements for staff. In addition, the Digital Capabilities Survey should be re-run. Furthermore, a ping metric should be introduced, highlighting the quality of the internet connection at locations across campus, with this information being communicated on digital screens.

Fortunately, there was happier news for student voice, where scores are now approaching or above the 2017 levels. Indeed, the scale is now a mere 2.5 ppts beneath the OfS benchmark.

Apropos assessment and feedback, last year’s scores were encouraging, with all questions being above the respective benchmarks. Indeed, fair marking and assessment (Q9), as well as timely feedback (Q10), were both significantly so (as marked with striped bars in the following graph). However, in 2019, the scores in this scale deteriorated – most notably, statistics for the two afore-mentioned questions fell by four and five ppts respectively.

Elsewhere, there was a two-ppt decline for each question on the organisation and management scale, with the score for course organisation (Q15) now at a concerning 64%. Indeed, this and the question on communicating changes (Q17) are significantly below their benchmarks.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Following the move to Waterside at the start of the year, there were initially problems with timetabling, resulting in large cohorts finding themselves placed in small rooms. Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes. In addition, the staff email policy needs to be reintroduced and enforced.

## Individual Questions

Except on the Student Voice scale, there was only one question in the survey where satisfaction improved – namely, on the course presenting a challenge to students (Q4, teaching on my course, scale), which rose by 0.5 ppts.

Respondents were critical as to feeling part of a community (Q21, learning community scale), with this statistic now being at a three-year nadir. On this measure, the University is now at the lower end of the spectrum among the UK’s main providers, according to OfS figures. Meanwhile, despite a statistic of 81%, being able to contact staff (Q12, academic support scale) is significantly lower than its OfS benchmark (five ppts adrift).

## Satisfaction by Demographics

### Age

Except for the Students’ Union question, satisfaction was higher in 2018, overall and on each scale, for mature students, as opposed to their younger counterparts. On this occasion, it was universal, with the Union statistic for young students now below 50%. Indeed, there were lucid discrepancies between these groups in approval on assessment and feedback (six ppts), and learning community (five ppts).

But it should be noted that, for both young and mature students, contentment fell on every scale (other than for student voice) from 2018. This was particularly clear for learning resources, with descents of five ppts and nine ppts for young and mature respectively, with the latter demographic deprecating both the IT and library resources.

As illustrated below, young students were more excoriating on the assessment and feedback measure – regarding timely feedback (Q10), there was a variation of ten ppts.

By eight ppts, mature students again felt more that they were part of a community (Q21, learning community scale), despite the overall drop. And while there was a 0.09 ppt-gap last year on good advice being available (Q14, academic support scale), this has now swelled to six ppts in favour of mature students. Similarly, there remains a gap of seven ppts on the challenge presented by the course (Q4, teaching on my course scale) between mature and young.

### Disability

In several cases, respondents with a learning disability (such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or ADHD) offered greater satisfaction scores than those with either no-known disability or other disability. For instance, regarding the quality of course teaching, there was a difference of seven ppts between sample members with a learning disability and another disability (a gap that has expanded slightly from last year).

Indeed, since 2018, scores for learning disability sample members swelled by seven and eight ppts on the scales of student voice and overall satisfaction respectively (the latter in abundant contrast to the statistics for the no-known and other disability samples). The Union should also carefully contemplate its disappointing result amongst non-learning disability students (down by 12 ppts).

Again, the assessment and feedback statistics make for interesting reading. Contemplating only respondents with a non-learning disability from the last two years, there was a 12-ppt collapse on the alacrity of feedback, together with a nine-ppt drop apropos fair marking.

Elsewhere, sample members with a learning disability rated the clarity of marking criteria much more harshly, with satisfaction plummeting from 79% to 67%.

There are other points from individual questions worthy of note:

* Satisfaction for respondents with another disability fell by seven ppts on whether sufficient course advice had been offered (Q13, academic support scale). From being comfortably above last year, this figure has now fallen below that for the whole sector;
* Less than two-thirds (64%) of learning disability respondents believed that they are members of a staff-student community (Q21, learning community scale), after a decrease in approval of 13 ppts from 2018. Therefore, Northampton has slipped six ppts behind the concomitant sector figure;
* Again, in the learning community scale, there was a nine-ppt decrease in the score for having opportunities to work with other students (Q22) among respondents with another disability. Furthermore, this plummet means that it is currently exceeded by the sector;
* There is now an 11-ppt differential between learning-disability respondents and those with another disability on the metric of advice being available to make study choices (Q14, academic support scale).

### Domicile

The breakdown in satisfaction by domicile is extraordinary. For each scale, international students consistently rate their contentment more favourably than their EU or UK counterparts. In some cases, the discrepancies are quite stark – on organisation and management, the variation between international and UK students is 16 ppts, for learning community 10 ppts and, apropos the Students’ Union, the distinction is 25 ppts.

The reason for the contrast is perhaps exemplified by the following chart, which displays the distinction in scores between the last two years. Whereas satisfaction for international students rises on each scale (other than learning resources and overall), a universal fall is evident for home students (except student voice).

Also, differences between EU and international students are, periodically, diametrically opposed – this is particularly evident for organisation and management, learning community, student voice and the Students’ Union.

The surge in approval among international students regarding organisation and management is notable. When examining this in more detail, satisfaction exceeds both EU and UK students on all three questions.

A germane picture is displayed on the learning community scale, whereby international students are much more likely to say that they feel part of a community (Q21) than EU and UK students (by margins of 19 ppts and 14 ppts respectively).

The table below outlines further contrasts in variation between EU and international scores on six questions. Here, we see that while international statistics for Northampton rose to go beyond sector expectation, the absolute reverse is seen for EU scores. For EU respondents, prompt feedback (Q10, assessment and feedback scale), notification of course changes (Q17, organisation and management scale) and appreciating students’ views (Q25, student voice scale) are the most unsettling aspects.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Difference between: | Northampton EU scores (last two years) | | Northampton and sector EU scores (2019) | | Northampton international scores (last two years) | | Northampton and sector international scores (2019) |
| Timely feedback (Q10) | -11 ppts | -6 ppts | | 13 ppts | | 8 ppts | |
| Received sufficient advice (Q13) | -10 ppts | -1 ppt | | 7 ppts | | 6 ppts | |
| Well-organised course (Q15) | -9 ppts | -5 ppts | | 9 ppts | | 5 ppts | |
| Communication of changes (Q17) | -17 ppts | -11 ppts | | 18 ppts | | 9 ppts | |
| Opportunities to give feedback (Q23) | -7 ppts | -6 ppts | | 13 ppts | | 3 ppts | |
| Student opinions are valued (Q24) | -15 ppts | -9 ppts | | 8 ppts | | 6 ppts | |

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: With the uncertainty over Brexit and the increasing possibility of the UK leaving the European Union under a no-deal scenario, it is important that lecturers communicate with students on the matter. To this end, Universities UK have produced a helpful fact-file for EU students: <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/brexit/Documents/eu-student-faq.pdf>. The University should consider any difference in induction between international and EU students. Further, the position of EU Officer at the Students’ Union is currently vacant and needs to be filled quickly.

### Ethnicity

On most scales, the variation between white and BAME respondents is reasonably minor (less than 3.5 ppts). However, for organisation and management, there is a 12-ppt differential in favour of BAME sample members (including a division of 16 ppts on course organisation – Q15), similarly ten ppts in relation to Students’ Union representation.

Furthermore, the score for learning resources is newsworthy – although the difference here is three ppts, this expands to 11 ppts between black and Asian respondents, with the latter showing sharp drops in satisfaction for IT (Q18) and course-specific resources (Q20) from 2018.

Relative to last year, changes in either approval or disapproval were occasionally inconsequential. Yet, this was not the case for learning resources and the Students’ Union, where more dissatisfaction was witnessed for the two demographics. Scores for both groups went either up or down harmoniously, except for the organisation and management metric (helping to explain the difference outlined above).

For the assessment and feedback scale, BAME respondents expressed more contentment than their white counterparts on comments being punctual (Q10) and useful (Q11), despite satisfaction falling from last year on both questions for each demographic. However, this was not the case on the question of fair marking, where a seven-ppt difference now exists (up by three ppts in 2018), with the BAME statistic now two ppts below the sector-wide score.

### Mode of Study

Homogenous with the previous year, scores were typically more vertiginous for full-time rather than part-time students. Indeed, the differential for academic support, organisation and management, and student voice all stood at nine ppts – for example, on the latter scale, there is now an 11-ppt difference on being able to provide course feedback (Q23). Despite this, there were two outliers – learning resources and the Students’ Union (where from a percentage point in arrears for 2018, part-time students are now 15 ppts more content).

There was a surge in support among part-time respondents regarding learning opportunities and the learning community. Indeed, for the former, satisfaction on students being able to explore ideas in depth (Q5) and bring these together (Q6) escalated by 12 and ten ppts respectively from 2018. Similarly, an incline of 16 ppts was witnessed for this demographic being a member of a community (Q21, learning community scale).

However, there was palpable disquiet on course organisation. While there were modest falls for full-time sample members, support among part-time respondents collapsed, with communication of course alterations (Q17) being particularly pilloried to a figure that stands 16 ppts beneath the sector.

Meanwhile, the score for receiving helpful comments (Q11, assessment and feedback scale) should be noted – last year, the divide between full-time and part-time was 21 ppts, but this has now more than halved.

### POLAR

The below graph evinces, for the most part, minimal distinction in satisfaction across POLAR quintiles[[5]](#footnote-5). However, a six-ppt schism now exists between quintiles 5 and 1 in relation to academic support, which extends to nine ppts regarding study-choice advice (Q14). However, quintile 1 has a clear lead in its ranking of the Students’ Union.

Indeed, these observations are elucidated by the six-ppt descent from 2018 for academic support among quintile 1, as well as a 12-ppt reverse in approval for the Students’ Union in the quintile-5 group. What is also apparent is that quintile-1 satisfaction decreased on every scale from 2018, other than for the Students’ Union question. This was most notable for overall satisfaction and learning resources (where the decline was also matched by quintile 5).

Together with both quintiles harshly censuring the quality of IT, library and course-specific resources (Q18-Q20, learning resources scale), there was also an especial issue for quintile 1 regarding assessment and feedback. Excluding a negligible rise on clear marking criteria, satisfaction fell on each of the other three questions, including by eight ppts on equitable marking (Q9), meaning the absolute scores between these two quintiles are now very similar.

In addition, approval plunged by an equivalent amount for quintile 1 for a separate question on the quality of advice to make study choices (Q14, academic support scale).

## Satisfaction by Faculty

The Faculty of Business and Law (FBL) lags behind the other faculties on six of the ten measures (if we include overall satisfaction), with the differential in approval between this and the top faculty ranging from 3.5 ppts to seven ppts (the latter figure relating to learning community). Meanwhile, there is a nine-ppt gap between the Faculty of Health and Society (FHS) and the Faculty of Arts, Science and Technology (FAST) on learning resources, as well as from FBL to the Faculty of Education and Humanities (FEH) regarding the Union.

We now consider each faculty in turn. Please note that the University has targets and thresholds for four metrics (the teaching on my course, assessment and feedback, academic support and overall satisfaction) in 2019, as shown in the following table.[[6]](#footnote-6)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | The teaching on my course | Assessment and feedback | Academic support | Overall satisfaction |
| Target | 90% or above | 80% or above | 86% or above | 90% or above |
| Threshold | Less than 80% | Less than 73% | Less than 78% | Less than 80% |

Scores above a target are indicated by a striped bar, satisfaction below a threshold is marked with a hashed bar on the charts, with only this year’s statistics marked.

### FAST

In FAST, approval was akin to last year, with slight rises and falls across scales. This was except for learning resources, whose score plummeted by seven ppts. Meanwhile, overall satisfaction in this faculty remains fractionally below the University’s threshold figure.

Contemplating learning resources in more detail, the reverse in contentment among FAST respondents on IT resources was not quite as severe as the overall Northampton picture. However, the opposite was true on library resources (including books, online services and learning spaces), where approval nosedived by ten ppts.

Beyond learning resources, there are other, salient satisfaction scores in FAST:

* An 8-ppt descent was apparent on the question of swift feedback to work (Q10, assessment and feedback scale);
* The sample denounced the efficacy of the timetable (Q16, organisation and management scale), with approval falling by ten ppts;
* Nevertheless, respondents lauded the merit assigned to their opinions by staff (Q24, student voice scale), as contentment enlarged by six ppts.

### FBL

We have already seen the struggles of FBL when compared with the other faculties. Indeed, out of the four University scale thresholds, three have not been attained this year (albeit by only 0.16 ppts in the case of teaching on my course). Meanwhile, the tumble in approval across scales here was more acute than for FAST, with plunges of eight and seven ppts for learning resources and the Students’ Union respectively.

One threshold not acquired was academic support. Although scale satisfaction was already marginally short of 80% in 2018, approval on each question for this metric has now fallen at a rate larger than that overall. Indeed, the sample rebuked both the advice on the course (Q13) and the study choices within it (Q14), the latter down by seven ppts.

FBL also presented some further takeaways:

* While FAST respondents fulminated about timetabling (Q16, organisation and management scale), their FBL counterparts were more content, with approval increasing by seven ppts;
* The FBL score (69%) for fair marking of work (Q9, assessment and feedback scale) is now the lowest of the four faculties, following a seven-ppt dive from last year. Moreover, by looking at the University’s enrolment data for 2018-19, we can see that this faculty has, by some distance, the highest proportion of BAME undergraduates at 73%[[7]](#footnote-7) (including both full-time and part-time students);
* Approval for IT resources and facilities (Q18, learning resources scale) dramatically collapsed by 17 ppts;
* Following more disharmony, the score (61%) for feeling part of a community (Q21, learning community scale) is now eight ppts adrift of any other faculty.

One other salient point is that, in 2017-18, the percentage of good degrees (first or 2:1) attained by part-time undergraduates in FBL was a mere 18% - the lowest of any faculty and commensurate with the statistic from the year before.[[8]](#footnote-8)

### FEH

FEH was the only faculty where none of the University’s main four scales were beneath their threshold values (although by a miniscule margin of 0.2 ppts in the case of assessment and feedback).

What is most obvious from the graph below is that satisfaction dropped from 2018 on every metric – indeed, the plummet was by at least ten ppts for assessment and feedback, learning resources, the Students’ Union and overall satisfaction. Last year, FEH was consistently exceeding the overall scores on every measure and, apart from the Students’ Union statistic, that remains true. But this sudden downturn in fortunes is rather perturbing.

Within assessment and feedback, approval splintered across the board, far outstripping the decline overall. Indeed, the score pertaining to lucid marking criteria (Q8) is now the lowest of the four faculties (previously, FEH had ranked highest on each question in this scale). Moreover, the drop in punctual feedback (Q10) was a scathing 15 ppts.

Other scores worthy of mention include:

* As seen consistently throughout, IT (Q18, learning resources scale) faced opprobrium from the FEH sample. The quality of library resources in supporting learning (Q19, learning resources scale) also descended by nine ppts;
* Scores for both the challenge presented by the course (Q4, teaching on my course scale) and the efficiency of the timetable (Q16, organisation and management scale) are now inferior to those for FAST, FBL and FHS, following falls of eight ppts apiece;
* For each question (Q12-Q14) in the academic support section (ability to contact staff, received ample guidance and solid advice on study options), support plunged at a greater rate than the three other faculties (although the absolute statistics remain above FBL and FHS).

### FHS

Despite changes from 2018 being minor, FHS outranked FAST, FBL and FEH in absolute scores on four scales, more than any faculty (last year, it did not achieve top spot once). Moreover, satisfaction grew in half of the metrics, with student voice rising by five ppts and overall satisfaction by three ppts. On the flipside, academic support is below the University’s threshold by 1.4 ppts.

The rise in support on student voice was particularly pleasing, with the statistic on having appropriate opportunities to give feedback on a programme (Q23) now exceeding the other faculties.

We should also bear in mind the following:

* FHS has the lowest scores across faculties regarding the ability to contact staff (Q12, academic support scale) and conveyance of course alterations (Q17, organisation and management scale);
* At 59%, course organisation (Q15, organisation and management) is now four ppts adrift of the other faculties.

Furthermore, there is an eye-catching comparison to be made in this faculty between young and mature regarding the attainment of a good degree (using the latest data from 2017-18) and whether the student is in graduate employment six months after qualifying, as elucidated by the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey[[9]](#footnote-9).

Here, it is evident that, on both metrics, there is a vast discrepancy, with both 25-29 and 30+ age groups being considerably more likely to earn a first or 2:1 and have a subsequent job. Indeed, for the latter, the gap is around 66 ppts for each age group.

### EWO

Beyond the four main faculties, it is worthwhile to also consider satisfaction among Education with Others (EWO). Here, all the University’s key metrics are below the threshold – to this end, overall satisfaction decreased by ten ppts.

On this metric and others such as assessment and feedback, and academic support, disapproval was comprehensively higher than for any of the main faculties. However, EWO held a slight advantage over the faculties regarding learning opportunities and learning community (in the latter case, following an increase of 14 ppts from 2018).

But there was a searing fall (15 ppts) in the statistic for organisation and management. On this scale, a staggering 23-ppt nosedive was witnessed on course changes being communicated effectively (Q17) to leave a satisfaction score of less than three-fifths (57%).

Only 23 respondents at partner institutions completed this year’s NSS. The probable consequence of this was to make the EWO statistics rather volatile. Nevertheless, the most profound changes (outside of organisation and management) are outlined in the table below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Biggest rises | Biggest falls |
| Clear that feedback has been acted on (Q25): 19 ppts | Library resources (Q19):  -17 ppts |
| Feel part of a community (Q21):  14 ppts | Fair marking (Q9):  -15 ppts |
| Able to work with other students (Q22): 14 ppts | Course-specific resources (Q20):  -12 ppts |
| Student opinions are valued (Q24):  12 ppts | Staff made subject interesting (Q2):  -10 ppts |
| Opportunities to bring information together (Q6): 11 ppts | Able to contact staff (Q12) / Received sufficient advice (Q13): -8 ppts |

## Satisfaction by Programme

In this year’s NSS, there were nine courses which achieved an overall satisfaction score of 100%. These are given below, together with their respective changes from 2018:

* BA Acting (FAST): up by eight ppts;
* BA Fine Art Painting & Drawing (FAST): up by 13 ppts;
* BA Graphic Communication (FAST): up by nine ppts;
* BA International Relations & Politics (FBL): no data from 2018;
* BA International Tourism Management (FBL): no change;
* BA Primary 3-7 (QTS) (FEH): no data from 2018;
* FdA Early Years (FEH): up by 12 ppts;
* BSc Human Bioscience (FHS): up by 26 ppts;
* BSc Podiatry (FHS): no change.

Here, we note that there are two courses – BA International Tourism Management and BSc Podiatry – which have maintained maximum satisfaction; indeed, the former programme has maintained this level since the format change in 2017.

Of the programmes whose overall satisfaction improved by at least 15 ppts from last year, seven were within FHS. However, although approval for BA Criminology went up by 33 ppts, its metric did start from a low base.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Programme | Faculty | 2019 score | Difference from 2018 |
| BA Criminology | FHS | 67% | 33 ppts |
| BSc Human Bioscience | FHS | 100% | 26 ppts |
| BSc Computing (Software Engineering) | FAST | 73% | 23 ppts |
| FdSc Dental Nursing | FHS | 92% | 22 ppts |
| BA Social Work | FHS | 84% | 22 ppts |
| BSc Midwifery | FHS | 88% | 22 ppts |
| BSc Children's Nursing | FHS | 88% | 21 ppts |
| BSc Banking & Financial Planning | FBL | 91% | 18 ppts |
| BSc Sport & Exercise Science | FHS | 92% | 18 ppts |
| BA Photography | FAST | 92% | 17 ppts |
| BA Acting (Creative Theatre) | FAST | 86% | 16 ppts |

Perhaps bizarrely, of courses which saw the highest drop in approval (more than 10 ppts), five were also from FHS. Interestingly, FdA Learning & Teaching, BA Sociology and FdSc Paramedic Science feature at the top of this table, having achieved maximum satisfaction last year.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Programme | Faculty | 2019 score | Difference from 2018 |
| BA Fine Art | FAST | 25% | -52 ppts |
| FdA Learning & Teaching | FEH | 61% | -39 ppts |
| BA Sociology | FHS | 77% | -23 ppts |
| FdSc Paramedic Science | FHS | 80% | -20 ppts |
| BA Events Management | FBL | 63% | -18 ppts |
| CertHE Mental Health | FHS | 67% | -18 ppts |
| BA Childhood & Youth | FEH | 71% | -16 ppts |
| BA Education Studies | FEH | 79% | -14 ppts |
| Bachelor of Laws | FBL | 73% | -14 ppts |
| BA Social & Community Development | FHS | 72% | -11 ppts |
| BSc Mental Health Nursing | FHS | 76% | -11 ppts |

We now go into more detail for each programme, grouped by faculty. As well as considering any comments received, scales are compared for the last two years and the current year for the whole University – referred to in labels as ‘All (Northampton)’. Remember that NSS scores for courses with fewer than ten respondents are not published and thus not treated here.

Reference is also made to the University’s targets and thresholds (as noted previously) for the scales of teaching on my course, assessment and feedback, academic support and overall satisfaction. These will be marked for 2019 scores only in the charts that follow in the usual way, i.e. satisfaction below a threshold is marked with a hashed bar, while above a target is indicated by a striped bar.

We also note that data such as course demographics, attainment gaps and graduate employment (which are used below) are available from the BIMI section of NILE. This is also true of withdrawal, continuation and progression rates, with this data applying to full-time, first-year undergraduates.

### FAST Programmes

***BA Acting***

BA Acting was one of the programmes to achieve maximum satisfaction overall. Furthermore, its statistics on the three other, key metrics also surpass the University’s targets. Indeed, on assessment and feedback, approval improved by ten ppts from last year. On many scales, movement relative to 2018 was slight – however, support collapsed drastically for learning resources and the Students’ Union by 15 and 36 ppts respectively (with both figures now below those posted for the whole institution).

Within the learning resources scale, there was the now-perennial protestation about IT (Q18), but in addition, satisfaction with course-specific resources (Q20) plummeted by 23 ppts to 69% (nine ppts below the University-wide figure), with one asserting that these were ‘over-stretched’. Furthermore, timetable efficiency (Q16, organisation and management scale) fell by ten ppts from 2018.

Yet, the comments made about the programme were very complimentary, with praise being reserved for the quality of teaching (one respondent declaring that it was ‘extremely high’) and how knowledgeable the teaching staff are – indeed, one sample member called the staff ‘a real credit to the University’, with another noting that they always go ‘above and beyond in both the pastoral and academic’.

A third wrote: “The Northampton BA Acting course has given me experiences like no other. The best thing is they not only provide everything that they 'should' provide, but they have also allowed for extra training that is vital for us as actors but not actually a module on the course. I have been so lucky to have trained on this course.”

Negative comments were few and far between, but some felt that course organisation could be improved, with one claiming that this can ‘hinder my work and/or impact my stress levels’.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Programme staff should reflect on the sufficiency of course resources. Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes.

***BA Acting (Creative Theatre)***

There was a significant augmentation (16 ppts) in overall satisfaction for BA Acting (Creative Theatre), resulting in this score being beyond that for the University. Meanwhile, teaching on my course is now beyond the 90% mark for approval and is hitting the target figure. However, despite an ascent of six ppts, assessment and feedback is still adrift of both its threshold and the University’s number by seven ppts – with prompt feedback on this scale (Q10) plunging to just 50%.

The falls in contentment regarding learning community and student voice were negligible, but the statistic for learning resources nosedived by 16 ppts. On this scale, the sample excoriated IT (Q18), library (Q19) and programme resources (Q20), with support descending by at least 14 ppts on each question – indeed, satisfaction with IT now stands at a disastrous 38%. Elsewhere, there was a 19-ppt fall on student feedback being acted on (Q25, student voice scale).

Many respondents singled out the enthusiasm of the staff. For instance, one wrote: “The teachers are highly-skilled, and their passion is what fuels mine. I feel very lucky to have met and been taught by these teachers and have such respect for the amount of dedication they have to the course and every individual student. I have seen a drastic improvement to my skill set over the last 3 years and hold my time on this course as a very valuable experience.” Others noted how they have been supported by staff, both academically and emotionally.

However, the most common complaint related to course organisation. One sample member said: “The organisation and communication between teachers, students and other courses has been rather poor and, in some cases, has caused added stress, upset and confusion, especially over dates for assessments.” Another added: “The amount of modules and assessments were considered 'too many' in my second year, whichoverloaded us all and drove us all to exhaustion, as we were completing 70-hour weeks.” Others bemoaned isolation at Avenue Campus and a lack of rehearsal space.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Programme staff should consider whether the workload for students is appropriate. Students must be made fully aware of when assignments are due, and be given timely feedback on their work. The feedback loop also needs to be closed – if no action has been taken on the back of student opinions, the reasons for this must be communicated to students.

***BA Fashion***

Overall satisfaction in BA Fashion currently stands above the University-wide figure by 1.5 ppts. Meanwhile, there were increases of 20 and 13 ppts respectively for the teaching quality, and assessment and feedback, resulting in both scales attaining their targets. Indeed, the statistic for teaching is now 97%. Despite approval dropping in the learning opportunities metric, the course statistic continues to outstrip that for Northampton as a whole; here, support dropped on students being given the opportunities to explore new ideas (Q5) and apply their knowledge (Q7), after each achieved maximum approval in 2018.

There were problems across the board regarding learning resources, as scale contentment fell by 22 ppts. Elsewhere, within organisation and management, the sample also denounced the efficacy with which course changes have been communicated (Q17) (down by 17 ppts).

Many respondents recognised the hard work and support of their tutors and technicians, with one noting that the staff ‘truly care about your progress and there is always help when you need it’. Another student posited their positive as ‘the experience we receive from working on live projects with industry – for example, Dr Martens, PCA, Hensman and Schwarzkopf.’

On the flipside, the predominant gripe concerned the move to Waterside and the facilities now available. Indeed, one claimed: “I feel like there is not enough room for all three-year groups of fashion to be in one room. It is hard to concentrate on my studies and find space to do my work.” Another asserted: “The University has lost a significant part of what made it special and different to other universities, purely by disregarding the arts.” A third added: “The open plan of the building and general lack of organisation or care for the creative students on the university's part has also had a negative effect on my chronic pain and has disenchanted me entirely from the course.” Moreover, a withdrawal rate in 2017-18 of 33% is rather troubling (having risen by a massive 28 ppts from the previous year), given the University’s threshold is 8%.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Course changes must be communicated to students at the first opportunity. The high withdrawal rate may require further investigation.

***BA Fine Art***

For BA Fine Art, satisfaction scores were, frankly, catastrophic. The overall statistic has nosedived from last year by a scarcely-believable 52 ppts, with only a quarter of respondents now expressing approval. Indeed, contentment has fallen on every scale, and consequently, course teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support are all beneath the University’s threshold figures.

Meanwhile, satisfaction for course organisation and management was almost halved from 2018; on this scale, approval collapsed by at least 34 ppts on each question. Moreover, only 25% could see how their feedback had been acted on (Q25, student voice scale). In amidst the chaos, there was a 14-ppt augmentation regarding accessibility of course resources (Q20, learning resources scale).

The comments helped to highlight the issues. One respondent wrote: “There was a very noticeable decrease in the number of taught sessions and lectures that we used to have, which used to be approximately twice a week and became around once every two to three weeks in my third year.” On the same theme, another added: “There has been a lack of cover for lectures missed by tutors. For our theory module in second year the tutor did not turn [up], nor was cover supplied. This meant we had only 6 lectures on that module all year round.” A third continued: “There was an entire module that we received little to no contact time for when we were scheduled to receive 2 hours per week. Though this was due to a staff illness, there was a distinct lack of support from other staff for the assignments involved due to business with other areas.”

Furthermore, criticism of communication was also made – one said: “The lack [of] delay in relaying vital information and support to the Avenue Campus regarding parking, whether the course would actually move and what changes were to be made was very disappointing.” Perhaps the remarks were summed up by one respondent, who simply pronounced: “Dropped out after 2 and half years.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Contingency planning for the absence of staff must be considered to minimise disruptions and ensure continuity in programme delivery. While the feedback loop needs to be closed with better communication, trips to exhibits/galleries, which form part of the programme (i.e. not needed to be organised by the student independently), is an idea worthy of consideration. Course changes must be communicated to students at the first opportunity.

***BA Fine Art Painting & Drawing***

Maximum overall satisfaction was achieved in BA Fine Art Painting and Drawing after a rise of 13 ppts from 2018. Furthermore, course teaching, together with assessment and feedback, are hitting their University targets, with approval for the former now at an impressive 90%. There were also surges in support for learning opportunities and student voice – indeed on these scales, 100% contentment was given on the course offering opportunities to explore new concepts (Q5) and use their knowledge (Q7), as well as being able to provide feedback (Q23).

The learning resources scale struggled – there was a 23-ppt drop for the library (Q19), while only 40% now approve of IT (Q18).

On this programme, satisfaction also declined in other areas:

* Helpful comments (Q11, assessment and feedback scale): 80% (down by 13 ppts);
* Able to contact staff (Q12, academic support scale): 80% (down by 13 ppts);
* Efficient timetabling (Q16, organisation and management scale): 70% (down by 17 ppts);
* Able to work with other students (Q22, learning community scale): 70% (down by 23 ppts).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**:BA Fine Art Painting and Drawing had plenty of positives. But more opportunities should be provided for students to collaborate on work, while better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes.

***BA Games Art***

Overall approval grew slightly by four ppts, but the statistic of 78% is still beneath the University’s figure and its threshold (in the latter case, by two ppts). However, every other scale for BA Games Art is now in excess of the figures posted by the provider, with enlargements in satisfaction from 2018 across the board. Furthermore, course teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support are all beyond the institution-wide, target values.

Moreover, bucking the trend of other programmes, satisfaction with learning resources rocketed up by 22 ppts, with the statistic for IT resources (Q18) more than doubling from last year. Similarly, course organisation (Q15, organisation and management) swelled by 19 ppts, but at 67% contentment, this score is still too low.

Sample members were complimentary of the teaching – one respondent described the proactiveness of staff as ‘astounding’, before adding: “They've always been ready to go above and beyond to help students and provide the best education they can.” In addition, students are ‘encouraged to explore beyond what they teach, they help you with that’. The programme is recognised as being ‘a good way to make connections with people on the course, lecturers and people in industry’, while it also operates a ‘social media group’ to share ideas and get support.

But most anxiety was expressed about the quantity of work, for which respondents claimed they did not get a ‘realistic amount of time’ and could ‘bring down the quality of everything overall’. In fact, one respondent proclaimed: “This course has burnt me out, as I don't feel like I would ever want to seek a job in the gaming industry.” Another claimed that there were ‘too many modules’ that were also ‘disjointed from one another’. The same sample member also queried the group project assignment, which is ‘often pitched incredibly unrealistically and is simply unachievable by most students’, as they are being asked to create games from ‘day one without the required knowledge’. Further, in 2017-18, there was a BAME progression gap of 27 ppts on the programme, while 25% of BAME students withdrew, double the figure for white students.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Programme staff should consider whether the workload for students is appropriate. The BAME progression and withdrawal rates may require further investigation.

***BA Graphic Communication***

100% overall satisfaction was attained by BA Graphic Communication – a statistic which has risen by nine ppts from 2018. The other three main scales (course teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support) all surpassed the University’s respective targets.

However, approval for assessment and feedback did slip back by nine ppts (this was caused by clear marking criteria (Q8) and timely feedback (Q10) dropping from maximum approval to 81% and 88% respectively). This was a common theme on several metrics, although it should be advanced that all scales (except for Students’ Union representation) are above those for the University, with contentment of at least 87%.

Other noticeable declines in satisfaction on individual questions included:

Efficient timetabling (Q16, organisation and management scale): 88% (down by eight ppts);

* Communication of changes (Q17, organisation and management scale): 88% (down by 13 ppts);
* Feel part of a community (Q21, learning community scale): 75% (down by eight ppts).

From the latest DLHE data, 82% of students were in graduate employment six months after qualifying (12 ppts above the University’s target), although this figure has dropped from 100% the previous year. However, regrettably, the gap in receiving good degrees between white and BAME students is a massive 45 ppts. Moreover, in 2017-18, there was also an attainment gap of 12 ppts between male and female students.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Given the significant BAME attainment gap, this provides evidence for the introduction of anonymous marking across the institution, where possible. The Students’ Union Elected Officers have committed to reopening the Student Survey to see whether Anonymous Marking would remedy and potential bias.

***BA Media Production and Moving Image***

Since 2018, there has been a five-ppt augmentation in overall satisfaction for BA Media Production and Moving Image – however, its mark of 79% remains below both the University’s statistic and threshold value. It was a similar story for the quality of teaching, whose metric nevertheless rose by 12 ppts; indeed, on this scale, the challenge presented by the course (Q4) now stands at 86% (having itself grown by 19 ppts).

Elsewhere, it was unfortunate to see the statistic for assessment and feedback slip back to 79%, caused predominantly by a 29-ppt reverse as to the promptness of feedback (Q10). There were further problems regarding the learning opportunities scale, where approval is now below two-thirds – the main perturbation here was whether the course had provided opportunities for students to bring various information together (Q6), as this statistic fell by 16 ppts.

For organisation and management, satisfaction of only 50% was delivered on the course being well-organised (Q15), while a score only seven ppts higher was apparent on communication of course changes (Q17). We also note that:

* Only 64% of respondents felt part of a community (Q21, learning community scale);
* Exactly half could understand how feedback by students had been acted upon (Q25, student voice scale).

The withdrawal rate of the programme was marginally above the University’s threshold (by 2.5 ppts), after suffering a slight rise from the year before.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Students must be given timely feedback on their work. Moreover, the feedback loop needs to be closed – if no action has been taken on the back of student opinions, the reasons for this must be communicated to students. Course changes must be communicated to students at the first opportunity. Programme staff should strive to create a better community (e.g. group work, social gatherings, interaction between different years).

***BA Photography***

After an excellent enlargement by 17 ppts from 2018, overall satisfaction with BA Photography is now a vertiginous 92% - a figure that is also comfortably beyond that for the University. Indeed, targets were hit on the three other, key metrics (course teaching, assessment and feedback and academic support). Moreover, the surge in approval for teaching quality was courtesy of maximum scores being attained on staff making the subject interesting (Q2) and students being challenged to produce their best work (Q4).

Strong gains were also evident on organisation and management, learning resources and learning community, driven respectively by gains in the following questions:

* Well-organised course (Q15): 85% (up by 28 ppts);
* Course-specific resources (Q20): 92% (up by 24 ppts);
* Feel part of a community (Q21): 100% (up by 27 ppts).

On the flipside, there was a plunge of 15 ppts regarding respondents being able to get in touch with staff when required (Q12, academic support scale). Furthermore, the University should be aware of the 13-ppt attainment gap in good degrees between male and female students, while the programme’s withdrawal rate in 2017-18 of 20% is 12 ppts above the University’s threshold.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: The staff email policy needs to be reintroduced and enforced, while the withdrawal rate may require further investigation.

***BSc Computing (Software Engineering)***

From 2017-18, overall satisfaction augmented by 23 ppts in BSc Computing (Software Engineering), but nevertheless still remains seven ppts below the University’s threshold. This is also true for the assessment and feedback, and academic support scales where approval fell. In the latter case, timely and helpful feedback (Q10 and Q11) both posted scores below two-thirds, with contentment plunging by 13 and ten ppts respectively. However, teaching quality did improve to go beyond 80% contentment and be on a par with the University-wide figure.

A collapse of 32 ppts on the query of IT resources (Q18, learning resources scale) was seen, while course organisation (Q15, organisation and management scale) is only marginally above 60% satisfaction. Some troubling statistics were evident regarding student voice – for the most part, respondents believed that feedback mechanisms were in place (Q23), but were sceptical that staff valued their opinions (Q24) and were unaware what had been actioned as a result (Q25).

Commenters asserted that the tutors were ‘very supportive’, while ‘most of the lecturers are really passionate about the subjects they teach’. A couple of respondents noted ease with contacting staff, with one adding: “Some lecturers have organised exterior events out of university so to help with learning on the degree.”

However, sample members mostly criticised computers and software. In particular, one felt that there were ‘a lack of computer facilities’ at Waterside, with another requesting ‘higher access levels to be able to install programmes’. A third stated: “Some modules teach out-of-date technology.” Course organisation was also cited –a commuter who had one lesson a day stated ‘more structured or organised timeframes of the module’ was needed. Also, someone said that they could wait ‘over a month’ for results to be given.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Programme staff must ensure that the software used is current and up-to-date. Students must be given timely and clear feedback on their work, with explanations on how they can improve in future assignments. Moreover, the feedback loop needs to be closed – if no action has been taken on the back of student opinions, the reasons for this must be communicated to students.

***BSc Engineering***

In BSc Engineering, an increase in satisfaction of 13 ppts was produced for the course overall, but this is still some way below the University’s own figure and threshold. In fact, none of the scales have approval in excess of that for the University. Of course, this includes course teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support, all of which are not attaining their threshold figures. Focussing specifically on academic support, a 16-ppt decline was evident on being able to contact staff (Q12), while only 56% had received sufficient, course-related advice (Q13).

An organisation and management approval score of 44% is highly disappointing – indeed, on this scale, just over a third could say that the course was well-organised (Q15), together with a reverse of 21 ppts on the quality of timetabling (Q16).

Other low results included:

* IT resources (Q18, learning resources scale): 43% (down by 42 ppts);
* Feel part of a community (Q21, learning community scale): 44% (up by 15 ppts);
* Clear that feedback has been acted on(Q25, student voice scale): 44% (up by 15 ppts).

Speaking in a general context, one respondent wrote: “They have moved to a new campus and the Engineering Department has shrunk significantly. [There is] reduced access to labs and lecturers are based in another building, making communication and organisation much more difficult.” Another requested more course representation. Meanwhile, a withdrawal rate in 2017-18 of 47% is genuine cause for concern, given this was the consequence of a 25-ppt rise from the previous year.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes. Further, overall organisation of the programme must be improved. The staff email policy needs to be reintroduced and enforced, while the feedback loop needs to be closed – if no action has been taken on the back of student opinions, the reasons for this must be communicated to students. The withdrawal rate may require further investigation.

***BSc Geography***

There was an improvement in overall approval of four ppts for BSc Geography to take it above the University-wide mark. Indeed, satisfaction has grown on every scale since last year and is ahead of the University across the board, except for the Students’ Union by a fractional amount. Thus, both assessment and feedback, as well as academic support, have surpassed the respective Northampton targets, while teaching missed out on repeating the trick by a negligible 0.5 ppts. In the case of academic support, 95% felt that they had received sufficient course advice (Q13) – a rise of 25 ppts.

However, there were plummets in scores on individual questions:

* Fair marking (Q9, assessment and feedback scale): 68% (down by 12ppts);
* Efficient timetabling (Q16, organisation and management scale): 63% (down by 17 ppts);
* IT resources (Q18, learning resources scale): 63% (down by 12 ppts).

Numerous respondents were highly complimentary of the programme’s field trips, which were described as ‘amazing’ and a ‘great way to learn’. Indeed, one student opined that the USA trip was a ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ experience. Others expressed satisfaction with the feedback they had received, which was ‘always useful to help me improve for other assignments’, according to a respondent. Meanwhile, students also appreciated the class sizes, which were small and thus produced ‘more face-to-face learning time’. Moreover, the course was recognised for being well-organised.

However, there was disapproval regarding the standard of marking. Indeed, one respondent said: “Not all staff are consistent with marking criteria.” Another added: “When teachers are marking, they mark to how they like it individually rather than how it should be marked.” Two sample members wondered whether the Human Geography pathway could have a greater choice of modules, while there were issues with the GIS software (that it was ‘often problematic, needs updating’ or ‘not available at home’, while ‘computers for GIS work [are] not available [until] 6pm’).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: All assignments should have clear and detailed marking rubrics to ensure fair and consistent marking. More reliable and greater accessibility to GIS is needed. Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes.

### FBL Programmes

***BA Advertising & Digital Marketing***

For this programme, scores are not available for 2018, so we just contrast against the University as a whole. Overall satisfaction is two ppts above the University, with a figure of 83%. However, both assessment and feedback, together with academic support, are beneath the University’s thresholds (although only by extremely narrow margins). Indeed, only 58% thought that the programme’s marking had been fair (Q9, assessment and feedback scale), while the same percentage approved of the availability of advice to make study choices (Q14, academic support scale).

The organisation and management metric struggled, with only half the sample determining that the course was well-organised (Q15). For learning resources, there were problems with IT (Q18) and course resources (Q20), with differentials from the University of 23 and 24 ppts respectively.

Among the positive comments, one wrote: “My knowledge of the subject and how to apply it in a real-life business context has improved significantly. My tutors have been very supportive and have made this course so engaging.” Another added: “The most positive part of my course has been the opportunities it has presented. I have been able to connect to many professionals and it has led to paid work alongside my studies.” A third continued: “The modules are all incredibly relevant and they work well together to create an overall good course.”

However, a couple of respondents thought that better descriptions of the modules were required (including ‘examples of the kind of things you would be doing in-class’). Others felt that academic staff aren’t interested in student opinion, while one sample member stated: “I want more external speakers to understand how the stuff I learn on the course would benefit me. It would also give students insights into the paths that they can take.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Given 53% of known ethnicity on the programme are currently BAME students (across stages), the fair marking issue provides evidence for the introduction of anonymous marking across the institution, where possible. Programme staff should reflect on the sufficiency of course resources, while talks from industry figures is an interesting suggestion.

***BA Business Studies***

Overall satisfaction increased by five ppts from last year, but the score is still ten ppts beneath the University’s threshold figure. Regrettably, the three other, key metrics told a similar story, having all fallen from their respective 2018 statistics. In fact, the decline was most noticeable on academic support, resulting in approval standing at just 56% (a figure that is 22 ppts under the University’s mark). For this scale, contentment with being able to contact staff (Q12) collapsed by 32 ppts, while the values of sufficient advice on the course (Q13) and study choices (Q14) also decreased.

Moreover, the sample excoriated how prompt feedback had been on work (Q10, assessment and feedback scale), with approval now down to 48%. In addition, just over half concluded that the programme was well-organised (Q15)

The sample had an especial problem with marking, whether it was ‘unfair’, ‘inconsistent’ or ‘late’. One respondent said: “A certain lecturer graded me a very average mark for an assignment I worked so hard for. It was my lowest mark of my whole year by a lot. Ironically, I then discover other ethnic students have been ungraded fairly by this lecturer in all different modules/years, etc., and months later hear that they all actually complained and reported him/her.”

Numerous students mentioned how difficult they have found it to contact tutors (mainly by email), who are not timely in replying. Also, one claimed: “[I] struggle to form a relationship with tutors, as we never see them.” In addition, others expressed their disappointment with the information available about assignments, which have been ‘poorly explained’ and ‘extremely vague’. Another said: “I don't think enough guidance and help is provided for students, including for the dissertation. I feel like I have been left to my own devices for most of my course and it has affected my mental health.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: The staff email policy needs to be reintroduced and enforced, while students must be given timely feedback on their work. Assignment briefs should be clearly linked to learning outcomes and be distributed to students. Given 58% of known ethnicity on the programme are currently BAME students (across stages), the fair marking issue provides evidence for the introduction of anonymous marking across the institution, where possible.

***BA Events Management***

There was a sudden plunge of 18 ppts in overall satisfaction for BA Events Management, and consequently, its score is significantly underneath the University’s threshold. There was an even bigger decline on the academic support metric, with the ability to contact staff (Q12) and receiving good advice to make study choices (Q14) being worse than last year. While assessment and feedback also stumbled, there was more pleasing news for teaching quality, which was the only scale whose satisfaction had risen.

Each individual question in organisation and management saw a decline in satisfaction – by 15 ppts for the course being well-organised (Q15), eight ppts regarding an efficient timetable (Q16) and by 27 ppts on communication of changes. Meanwhile, only 52% recognised how their feedback had been acted upon (Q25, student voice scale).

Respondents praised the study trips offered by the programme (including to London and York) – indeed, one said: “The use of trips in both first and second year helps you bond with your peers.” Furthermore, another added: “Practical experience is a huge part of the course and I think that is vitally important to my type of degree.” A third emphasised the ‘opportunity to be involved in event planning through the University’. The content within the course was also applauded.

Yet, comments about the academic staff were more nuanced. On this point, one asserted: “Some lecturers are hugely helpful and always reply to emails; however, others are very unsupportive and can even seem to be purposefully unhelpful.” Another concluded that there are members of staff who ‘ignore students and do not give us the attention we require’. Some felt that their assignment briefs required more clarity, while the quality of the feedback received was also questioned. Sample members wondered whether there was ‘too much group work’, which ‘makes it harder to perform well as an individual’. It was also felt that students should be graded on the second-year event itself.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Course changes must be communicated to students at the first opportunity. Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes. In addition, the staff email policy needs to be reintroduced and enforced, while the feedback loop also should be closed. Specific points on group work and event grading should also provoke thought.

***BA Fashion Marketing***

In BA Fashion Marketing, overall satisfaction climbed by 13 ppts from 2018, with its value now exceeding that for the University and the institution’s threshold. Approval also ascended on teaching quality, assessment and feedback, and academic support, but with each starting from a low base, they are not achieving the statistics that should be expected.

For example, the figure for assessment and feedback (50%) remains 23 ppts beneath the threshold. Here, just 37% concluded that feedback had been timely (Q10), 47% determined that marking had been fair (Q9) and 58% thought that the marking criteria had been clear (Q8). Furthermore, teaching on my course also produced two disappointing scores – staff making the subject interesting (Q2) and students being challenged by the course (Q4).

But the scores for each scale either remained constant or improved, with the exception of student voice. This produced satisfaction for individual questions as follows:

Opportunities to give feedback (Q23): 83% (up by 13 ppts);

Student opinions are valued (Q24): 56% (down by 14 ppts);

Clear that feedback has been acted on (Q25): 22% (down by 18 ppts).

Yet, the programme had a continuation rate in 2017-18 of 94%, exceeding the University’s target by a single percentage point.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: The feedback loop needs to be closed – if no action has been taken on the back of student opinions, the reasons for this must be communicated to students. All assignments should have clear and detailed marking rubrics to ensure fair and consistent marking, while students must be given timely feedback on their work. Assignment briefs should be clearly linked to learning outcomes and be distributed to students.

***BA Human Resource Management***

There was a gratifying ten-ppt rise in overall satisfaction, as BA Human Resource Management attained the University’s target of 90%. In fact, approval augmented on every scale from last year, except for academic support. Here, the statistic remained constant and below the University’s threshold, with the main issue being contentment at advice being available to make study choices (Q14) remaining static at three-fifths.

However, there were surges in support regarding course teaching, and assessment and feedback – of 15 ppts and 23 ppts respectively – to take these scales beyond the University’s targets. Notable scores for individual questions here were:

* Teaching on my course
  + Staff explain things well (Q1): 100% (up by 20 ppts);
  + Challenge of course (Q4): 100% (up by 30 ppts).
* Assessment and feedback
  + Fair marking (Q9): 90% (up by 30 ppts);
  + Timely feedback (Q10): 80% (up by 30 ppts).
  + Yet, only 60% concluded that changes in the course had been communicated effectively (Q17, organisation and management scale).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Course changes must be communicated to students at the first opportunity (a pertinent point given 49% of those on the programme across stages this year were aged 21 or over), while staff should reflect on their availability to students in being able to give out advice.

***BA International Business***

After an improvement of nine ppts from 2018, overall satisfaction for BA International Business is now just meeting the University’s target of 80%. However, the same cannot be said for the three other, key metrics, with only academic support showing a minor enhancement. Only 53% approve of assessment and feedback, which had individual question scores as follows:

* Clear marking criteria (Q8): 54% (down by 13 ppts);
* Fair marking (Q9): 42% (down by 29 ppts);
* Timely feedback (Q10): 50% (down by 13 ppts);
* Helpful comments (Q11): 65% (down by one ppt).

Also, just over half could see how feedback had been acted on (Q25, student voice).

The provision of trips was praised by respondents as ‘really helpful’ and ‘effective’ – one said: “[They] helped me learn about new cultures and look at the world from a different perspective.” The ‘wide variety of module choices’ and ‘ability to do group projects’ were also recognised.

However, the quality of assignment briefs was criticised, with one claiming that, sometimes, it is ‘not made clear’ what students have to do. In addition, another requested ‘more feedback’ for their work, while a third asserted that the feedback can be ‘tricky to grasp’. A couple of sample members bemoaned their difficulty in contacting academic staff, whose response times were ‘not fast enough’. Several also pointed out either the lack of communication about choosing modules (‘there isn’t much information’) or between modules, thus resulting in ‘multiple deadlines on the same day’. Regarding marking, one student said: “Throughout, teachers have said things which can be done for an assignment, then when graded, we are penalised.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Assignment briefs should be clearly linked to learning outcomes and be distributed to students. Given 81% of known ethnicity on the programme are currently BAME students (across stages), the fair marking issue provides evidence for the introduction of anonymous marking across the institution, where possible. Students must be given timely feedback on their work. The staff email policy needs to be reintroduced and enforced, while better staff communication is needed to reduce clashes in due dates.

***BA International Relations & Politics***

For this programme, scores are not available for 2018, so we just contrast against the University as a whole. BA International Relations & Politics achieved maximum overall satisfaction, a figure that was 19 ppts beyond that for the University. Indeed, programme approval scores outperformed those for the University across every scale.

In the cases of course teaching and academic support, contentment was hitting the University’s targets. Regarding the former, scores for individual questions were consistently high, with only the ability of staff to explain things (Q1) having a statistic below 90%. Furthermore, all respondents asserted that they could contact staff when required (Q12, academic support scale).

The learning opportunities scores were even more impressive:

* Opportunities to explore new ideas (Q5): 100% (18 ppts above the University);
* Opportunities to bring information together (Q6): 100% (16 ppts above the University);
* Opportunities to apply what has been learnt (Q7): 93% (10 ppts above the University).

Across questions, the only relative struggle was on fair marking (Q9, assessment and feedback scale), returning a figure of 71%. Yet, last year’s withdrawal rate of 40% was far too high.

One respondent said that they would ‘highly recommend’ the programme, adding: “The course has been very enjoyable, I have got to know my lecturers well and have enjoyed learning from them.” Another continued: “At first, I was unsure about whether politics was for me as I had not studied politics before, but I'm so glad I did it. I have learnt so much and my interest in the subject continues to grow each day.” The variety of module options in the third year was also praised.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Given 61% of known ethnicity on the programme are currently BAME students (across stages), the lower fair marking score provides evidence for the introduction of anonymous marking across the institution, where possible. The high withdrawal rate may require further investigation.

***BA International Tourism Management***

Akin to last year, BA International Tourism Management attained maximum overall satisfaction among NSS respondents. However, this score does seem rather incongruous, given approval fell on every other scale, with only learning opportunities above the 90% mark. Moreover, there was a 19-ppt decline for academic support, taking it below the University’s threshold value; indeed, the principal cause was a score of 62% on good advice being available to make study choices (Q14), having suffered a 31-ppt plunge in support. Nevertheless, assessment and feedback continues to hit its University target.

Approval on the learning community scale collapsed rather dramatically, as illustrated by results from the individual questions:

* Feel part of a community (Q21): 46% (down by 32 ppts);
* Able to work with other students (Q22): 69% (down by 31 ppts).

Further potential issues were raised regarding communication of course changes (Q17, organisation and management scale) and how student feedback has been acted on (Q25, student voice scale), with satisfaction in each case at 69%.

In 2017-18, the withdrawal rate for the programme was 36% – a statistic which had increased by 12 ppts from the previous year and is now 28 ppts above the University’s threshold. Understandably, this should be cause for concern.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Programme staff should strive to create a better community (e.g. group work, social gatherings, interaction between different years). They should also reflect on their availability to students in being able to give out advice. Course changes must be communicated to students at the first opportunity. The feedback loop also needs to be closed – if no action has been taken on the back of student opinions, the reasons for this must be communicated to students.

***Bachelor of Laws***

From a figure of 88% in 2018, overall satisfaction has fallen away by 14 ppts and is now below the University’s threshold. Indeed, other than organisation and management, approval dropped on every scale, with assessment and feedback, and academic support both being beneath their expected University figures. In the latter case, only three-fifths concluded that good advice was available to make study choices (Q14), with this statistic descending by 16 ppts. Within assessment and feedback, less than two-thirds thought that marking criteria had been clear (Q8) and marking had been fair (Q9), while only 57% determined that feedback had been prompt (Q10).

A nosedive of 24 ppts was witnessed on respondents feeling part of a community (Q21, learning community scale). Moreover, the proportion who can say how feedback had been acted upon (Q25, student voice scale) remained static at 50%. Academic staff were praised by several respondents as ‘helpful’ and ‘very supportive’. Many also appreciated the quality of teaching, which was described as ‘excellent’ and ‘enthusiastic’, with lectures being ‘interesting whilst still informative’. The choice in modules was also recognised.

However, while a couple of respondents expressed a preference for more face-to-face time, others criticised the quality of online lectures. One said: “Online lectures were often distorted and difficult to hear or understand; student support was advised of this, but no action [was] taken.” Another added: “Blended learning relies on poor quality software and IT. Online lectures [are] often inaccessible, an issue that has been raised repeatedly without any resolution.”

Clearer assignment briefs were also mentioned, together with more opportunities for work experience and external speakers. Another suggested: “[You could] encourage the different years and students to work together to help one another and give that feeling of a community.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Programme staff should work with IT to ensure that online lectures are accessible and of the required quality. Opportunities for work experience/external speakers should be considered as part of the programme. The feedback loop must also be closed, while group work, social gatherings or interaction between different years could increase the sense of community. Assignment briefs should be clearly linked to learning outcomes and be distributed to students.

***BSc Accounting & Finance***

There was a six-ppt descent in overall satisfaction, resulting in a score for BSc Accounting & Finance that is equivalent to the University as a whole. Indeed, approval declined on every metric, except for student voice, where there was an improvement of 11 ppts regarding course feedback being acted on (Q25). In the cases of teaching, and assessment and feedback, the fall was negligible – hence the latter was still hitting its University target of 80%, assisted by a ten-ppt increase in feedback to work being timely (Q10). Meanwhile, academic support was hampered by a plunge of 11 ppts on advice being available to make study choices (Q14).

Learning resources came in for criticism, with contentment dropping by 16 ppts on IT (Q18), ten ppts on library resources (Q19) and by 13 ppts on course resources (Q20). Meanwhile, course organisation (Q15) now stands at 72%, down from 85% last year.

One student wrote: “The university took us on a trip to Manchester United FC to help us to understand how the football club operates as a business … [which was beneficial for] our learning and financial reporting module.” Meanwhile, the topics covered were also praised. Respondents consistently described most of the programme’s lecturers as helpful; in addition, they were ‘willing to share their experiences for students’, together with being ‘really engaging’.

However, other academic staff members were criticised (anonymously). One sample member said: “I feel like nobody really understands what he/she wants us to know for the exam.” Another assailed the lack of explanation given on topics: “We are told to try [and] work it out on our own.” For a third, this led to problems in both the Financial Management and Taxation modules (year two), with several students thus receiving a ‘very low grade’. For one project, it was claimed that students were given conflicting messages by academic staff as to what was expected. There were further fulminations about library resources (where ‘10 are required to share one book’, with most of the books not being ‘the latest version’ that form part of reading lists) and the ‘bad’ software.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Programme staff must take time, both in and out of the lectures, to explain content as required to students. Both the quantity and quality of library resources should be assessed, while the software used should be current and up-to-date. Assignment briefs should be clearly linked to learning outcomes and be distributed to students.

***BSc Banking & Financial Planning***

There was a substantial improvement of 18 ppts in overall satisfaction, taking the score for BSc Banking & Financial Planning above the University’s target. In fact, approval rose on each scale from last year, except for learning community. This led to course teaching hitting its institution target too, with maximum contentment shown on the course being intellectually stimulating (Q3). However, academic support remains below par, after an 18-ppt descent in good advice being available to make study choices (Q14).

On assessment and feedback, fair marking (Q9) was rated at 73%, 18 ppts lower than 2018, while helpful feedback (Q11) remained static at the same percentage. Meanwhile, less than two-thirds felt part of a community (Q21, learning community scale) and only 55% could see how student feedback had been acted on (Q25, student voice scale).

Despite this, significant enhancements on organisation and management were apparent:

* Well-organised course (Q15): 82% (up by 27 ppts);
* Efficient timetabling (Q16): 91% (up by 27 ppts);
* Communication of changes (Q17): 91% (up by 36 ppts).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Given 67% of known ethnicity on the programme are currently BAME students (across stages), the drop in satisfaction with fair marking provides evidence for the introduction of anonymous marking across the institution, where possible. Programme staff should reflect on their availability to students to give advice, and offer clear feedback with explanations on how students can improve. The feedback loop also needs to be closed – if no action has been taken on the back of student opinions, the reasons for this must be communicated to students.

***BSc Marketing Management***

In 2018, BSc Marketing Management attained maximum overall satisfaction – despite this metric slipping back slightly to 92%, the University’s target has still been reached. Indeed, approval fell on every scale this time around, although this did not stop both teaching and academic support achieving their institution targets. However, this was not the case for assessment and feedback, where statistics descended on each question, including by 22 ppts on students receiving helpful comments about their work (Q11).

Moreover, contentment on student voice collapsed by 33 ppts – now, only half could identify how their feedback had been acted on (Q25), while there was a 30 ppt-drop in the value placed by staff on student opinions (Q24). Satisfaction on the learning community scale also suffered:

* Feel part of a community (Q21): 50% (down by 33 ppts);
* Able to work with other students (Q22): 69% (down by 22 ppts).

Academic staff members were widely praised by survey respondents for being ‘very supportive’, ‘passionate’ and ‘always available to help’. One sample member asserted that this was a ‘brilliant course with brilliant lecturers’, before adding: “I have learnt so much from my lecturers. [They have] been amazingly helpful with assignment support and dissertation support.” Another said: “I started off with average grades, now I am achieving very good grades and I believe the reason for this is the hard work I have put in and the support I receive from my teachers.” A third claimed that they had learnt ‘many valuable skills’ on the course.

However, a couple of respondents thought that the programme could be augmented with trips (to advertising agencies or companies) and work experience opportunities. It was also felt that more emphasis could be placed on digital marketing within the course content, while there may have been some inconsistency in marking with ‘different tutors looking for different things’.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Programme staff should offer clear feedback with explanations on how students can improve in future assignments. The feedback loop needs to be closed, while group work, social gatherings or trips could improve the sense of community. Consideration should be given to the suggestion of adding digital marketing content to the programme.

### FEH Programmes

***BA Childhood & Youth***

Overall satisfaction plunged by 16 ppts from the previous year and is now nine ppts below the University’s threshold figure of 80%. Indeed, approval fell on every scale (except for learning opportunities which rose by a miniscule 0.07 ppts). The consequence of this was that both teaching quality and academic support found themselves underneath their respective thresholds. In the latter case, the statistic for receipt of sufficient course-related advice (Q13) descended by 16 ppts to 71%. Nevertheless, assessment and feedback is still hitting its target, courtesy of 95% contentment on feedback to work being prompt (Q10).

There was censure on the organisation and management scale – only 57% thought that the course was well-organised (Q15), while there was a 16-ppt plunge on timetabling (Q16). Moreover, just over half felt that they were part of a community (Q21), and the score for feedback being acted on (Q25, student voice scale) tumbled by 30 ppts.

Respondents identified the feedback on work as a strength of the programme, which is ‘detailed and timely’. Prompt replies to emails by lecturers are also praised, together with the offer to have ‘review meetings’, if required. The staff were seen to go above and beyond to give students the ‘best possible chance to be employed after the course’. There was also strong appreciation for the provision of work-based placements throughout, which helps students to ‘gain knowledge’ in working with children and young people. Furthermore, guest speakers were ‘valuable and inspiring’, while one respondent added: “Going to visit the prison was definitely my favourite time on the course, as it was so insightful, and I am forever referring back to it.”

However, requests were made for more contact time, which was described as ‘poor’ in the first two years. This would enable ‘more opportunities to discuss your grades’ and additional feedback. Importantly, in 2017-18, the BAME attainment gap was 32%.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: The attainment gap provides evidence for the introduction of anonymous marking across the institution, where possible. The feedback loop also needs to be closed. Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes.

***BA Early Childhood Studies***

Although overall satisfaction fell fractionally on this programme, the statistic of 92% is still exceeding the University’s target. This was also true as regards course teaching, while a 2-ppt rise on assessment and feedback was enough to take this scale above the 80% target. However, academic support narrowly missed out on making it a clean sweep, with advice to make study choices (Q14) declining to 76% approval. Meanwhile, learning opportunities was just one ppt short of attaining maximum contentment.

Just over two-thirds thought they were part of a community (Q21, learning community scale), after suffering an 11-ppt drop from 2018. Furthermore, 63% could ascertain how student feedback had been acted upon (Q25, student voice scale), with this statistic plunging by 18 ppts.

Various respondents lauded the placement opportunities that were available through the programme, with one talking about the ‘amazing opportunity to visit Sweden’. Another described their placement as ‘extremely interesting’, while a third noted that they had ‘learnt a lot’ from their placement. That said, a couple of sample members thought that the third-year placements were too long, when students have ‘a lot of other work to do’.

There was also conflict among respondents on the quality of feedback – while some thought it had been ‘helpful’, others disagreed. Indeed, one said: “Sometimes, I did not understand my feedback,” with another asserting that it did not offer ‘much explanation for poorer grades’. Nevertheless, lecturers were thought of as ‘so helpful and caring’, who are ‘great at getting back to you when you need them’. The use of guest speakers was also found to be beneficial.

One respondent felt that ‘more information on other job pathways other than teaching could be emphasised’. In addition, another added: “Over the three years, there were sessions that appeared slightly personal and intrusive which made me feel quite uncomfortable, so I would suggest that students were given a 'warning' prior to these sessions.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Programme staff should offer clear feedback with explanations on how students can improve in future assignments. The feedback loop must be closed, while staff should strive to create a better community (e.g. group work, social gatherings).

***BA Education Studies***

A descent of 14 ppts has caused the overall satisfaction for BA Education Studies to fall below the University’s threshold number. As it turned out, approval fell on every scale for this programme. In the case of academic support, this was by 17 ppts, as less than two-thirds claimed that good advice was available as regards study choices (Q14). Likewise, teaching quality, as well as assessment and feedback, have also dipped below their respective thresholds – in the latter case, only 57% concluded that marking had been fair (Q9).

Following a lofty statistic of 90% in 2018, contentment with learning community plummeted, as the figure for feeling part of a community (Q21) halved to a paltry 43%. Indeed, there were other questions where a similar trend was seen:

* Opportunities to explore new ideas (Q5, learning opportunities scale): 64% (down by 36 ppts);
* IT resources (Q18, learning resources scale): 54% (down by 46 ppts);
* Library resources (Q19, learning resources scale): 57% (down by 36 ppts);
* Clear that feedback has been acted on (Q25, student voice scale): 57% (down by 29 ppts).

The sample also identified problems with the challenge presented by the course (Q4, teaching on my course scale) and opportunities available to explore new ideas (Q5, learning opportunities scale), as satisfaction in each case was only 64%. We also note that, according to the latest data, half found graduate-level employment within six months, which was ten ppts beneath the threshold figure.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: All assignments should have clear and detailed marking rubrics to ensure fair and consistent marking. The feedback loop also needs to be closed, while programme staff should strive to create a better community (e.g. group work, social gatherings, interaction between different years). Consideration should also be given as to whether course content could be adapted so that students are given the challenge and motivation that they require.

**BA English**

Overall satisfaction with BA English rose steadily from last year, and is now three ppts underneath the University’s target. Furthermore, targets have been achieved on the three other, key metrics – teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support. In the latter case, support surged courtesy of 12 ppt-augmentations in both receiving advice in relation to the course (Q13) and study choices on the course (Q14). But for assessment and feedback, fair marking (Q9) is lagging behind other approval scores by standing at 73%.

Meanwhile, only three-fifths adjudicated that they were part of a community (Q21, learning community scale). Contentment with organisation and management slipped back from 2018, as 73% apiece ranked course organisation (Q15) and the efficiency of timetabling (Q16).

Programme staff were described by respondents as ‘passionate’, ‘really supportive’ and ‘knowledgeable’, who ‘clearly love their job’. One said: “The majority of lecturers have encouraged us to express our ideas without the feeling of being judged or being wrong. Their passion for the subject is catching.” Another added: “One of the highlights of my degree has been the personal touch; feeling like I am not just a number at Northampton has made all the difference.” The provision of theatre trips was also praised – one sample member asserted: “Being able to go and watch Shakespeare plays, and even smaller amateur productions, has been brilliant and improved my knowledge and understanding of certain texts.” Furthermore, there was appreciation for ‘new ways to carry out assignments such as The Podcast for the Victorian Gothic and Fantasy module’.

On the negative side, issues with timetabling were identified. One sample member commented: “I believe some of the deadlines (especially in second year) should be spaced out more. In a two-week period, I had four essays due in.” Another found ‘the constant changing of rooms’ as ‘very frustrating’. It was felt that there should be a greater choice of modules, while in the third year, more career workshops could be considered.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: All assignments should have clear and detailed marking rubrics to ensure fair and consistent marking. Better staff communication is needed to reduce clashes in due dates for assignments, while programme staff should strive to create a better community (e.g. group work, more trips, social gatherings).

***BA History***

Despite setting a very lofty level last year, overall satisfaction still managed to improve by a percentage point to 95% and remains beyond the University’s target. There were also marginal improvements for both academic support, and assessment and feedback, with both scales now topping the 90% mark. Indeed, for the former, there was a 12-ppt rise on students receiving sufficient course advice (Q13); for the latter, approval for clear marking criteria (Q8) augmented by eight ppts to 91%.

However, contentment on teaching did decrease from last year – the only key metric not hitting its target. This was caused by a 22-ppt descent on the course being challenging (Q4). Meanwhile, just over three-quarters could see how student feedback had been acted on (Q25, student voice scale), an increase of 22 ppts.

Respondents were complimentary about the ‘intellectual foundation of each module’, with the content being ‘interesting’ and ‘thoroughly engaging’. Furthermore, plaudits were given to academic staff, who are ‘invested in our learning’ and show a ‘genuine enjoyment for their subject’. One said: “They have provided me with confidence in my abilities as well as expanding my knowledge on modules and concepts. It has allowed me to grow as a person while completing my studies.” Another added: “I enjoy being in a relatively small course as it means I can get to know my tutors well and, in turn, they get to know my work well and can provide accurate feedback accordingly.” Sample members also appreciated that marking criteria had been available in advance, the library was ‘well-stocked with [relevant] books’ and staff can be contacted about any issues.

Despite this, a wider choice of modules was requested by some, while one student perceived an inconsistency in how promptly feedback on work is received. Moreover, it was noted that online sources listed on NELSON were not linked to any document. We should also bear in mind that the latest graduate-level employment from this course, six months after qualifying, was only 27%.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Programme staff should reflect on whether a greater choice of modules could be provided, which may increase the challenge of the course. They should also work with IT to ensure that sources on NELSON are up-to-date.

***BA Primary 3-7 (QTS)***

For this programme, scores are not available for 2018, so we can just contrast against the University as a whole. BA Primary 3-7 (QTS) attained maximum overall satisfaction, 19 ppts above the institution statistic. In fact, the course scores outranked those for the University on every scale (for example, by 24 ppts on learning community). Thus, both teaching quality (98%), and assessment and feedback (82%), hit their associated University targets. This was almost the case too for academic support, which missed out by 0.29 ppts.

The statistics for this programme were consistently high – for example on the teaching scale, three of the four questions had contentment of 100%. Furthermore, the most recent DLHE data shows that graduate employment within six months of qualifying was 97% (27 ppts above the University’s target). However, we should also note the following:

* Fair marking (Q9, assessment and feedback scale): 71% (0.5 ppts above the University);
* Well-organised course (Q15, organisation and management scale): 64%; (0.3 ppt above the University);
* Communication of changes (Q17, organisation and management scale): 71% (one ppt below the University).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: All assignments should have clear and detailed marking rubrics to ensure fair and consistent marking. Course changes must be communicated to students at the first opportunity.

***BA Primary Education***

Overall satisfaction for BA Primary Education fell back by eight ppts from last year to 84% - a figure that was, nevertheless, still above that posted by the University. While teaching quality remained above the University’s threshold, this was not the case for assessment and feedback, and academic support. The latter was hampered by less than two-thirds concluding that good advice was available to make study choices (Q14); yet, the former had more entrenched problems:

* Clear marking criteria (Q8): 42% (down by 36 ppts);
* Fair marking (Q9): 58% (down by 23 ppts);
* Helpful comments (Q11): 63% (down by nine ppts).

Many respondents praised the placement opportunities offered by the programme, which were described as ‘invaluable’ and ‘very good for my development as a teacher’. One added: “The range of placements given enables students to see a vast range of schools and get a better idea of the settings which they would prefer to work in.” There was also appreciation of the trips to, for instance, Hong Kong and Germany. The majority of staff members were referred to as ‘friendly’, ‘caring’ and ‘very enthusiastic about teaching’, who have also organised ‘pizza and drink social gatherings’. There was also felt to be a ‘good’ range of library resources available for the course.

There was widespread condemnation on the afore-mentioned issues with assessment and feedback. One explained: “The change in marking scheme was introduced at the beginning of our third year; however, it was never really thoroughly explained to us.” Another continued: “I feel that this put us at a disadvantage, considering our final year is double-weighted and the expectations were different to those of the previous year, which we built our writing style around.” Also, the marking was termed as ‘unfair’ and ‘not coherent’, while also having ‘inconsistency’. This seemed to be a particular issue in the Science module. Moreover, the feedback on work was criticised as being ‘not helpful’, while ‘assignment dates were moved around quite a bit during the last year’.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** Assignment briefs should be clearly linked to learning outcomes and be distributed to students. All assignments should have clear and detailed marking rubrics to ensure fair and consistent marking. Programme staff should also offer clear feedback with explanations on how students can improve, and reflect on their availability to students to give advice.

***BA Special Educational Needs & Inclusion***

Despite overall satisfaction dropping by nine ppts, the score for BA Special Educational Needs & Inclusion was still beyond the University’s threshold. This was also true for teaching quality, and assessment and feedback, whose statistic plummeted by 15 ppts due to just over three-quarters apiece concluding that the marking criteria were clear (Q8) and marking was fair (Q9). But completing a clean sweep of attained targets was academic support, where approval rose by three ppts – on this metric, 95% asserted that good advice was available to make study choices (Q14).

Elsewhere, the sample rebuked the quality of IT (Q18, learning resources scale), with contentment collapsing by 33 ppts to 55%. Moreover, the results for organisation and management were mixed:

* Well-organised course (Q15): 68% (up by 18 ppts);
* Efficient timetabling (Q16): 77% (down by ten ppts);
* Communication of changes (Q17): 73% (up by four ppts).

Commenters appreciated the support given to them by staff. One wrote: “Staff on my course provide a nurturing environment, and take great care to know each student.” Another added: “I have a disabled son … [but the] tutors have been amazing in helping me with my workload and … being understanding.” The ‘incredible’ provision of international trips was well-received, with one spending a summer in Hong Kong. There have also been ‘really beneficial’ placement opportunities, as well as insight gained by ‘regular visits from professionals, charities and businesses’.

Yet, a couple of respondents believed that feedback on work was not as ‘helpful’ or ‘clear’ as might be expected. Moreover, there was a potential timetabling issue with assignments, which clashed either with each other or with placements. We also note that less than a third were in graduate employment six months after qualifying, according to the latest data. Further, a 17-ppt gap was apparent in 2017-18 between non-disabled and disabled students in withdrawals.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: The withdrawal rate for disabled students may require further investigation. Programme staff should also offer clear feedback with explanations on how students can improve. Better staff communication is needed to reduce clashes in due dates for assignments or placements.

***FdA Early Years***

Overall satisfaction for FdA Early Years augmented by 12 ppts from last year to now attain a maximum score. The other three key metrics of teaching quality, assessment and feedback, and academic support also saw an enhancement in support, with all exceeding the University’s respective targets. In the case of teaching, three out of the four questions were awarded 100% approval from the sample. However, for assessment and feedback, there remains a relatively-minor problem with clear marking criteria (Q8) whose statistic was 75% (despite a modest rise of four ppts); further, there was a plunge of 13 ppts on feedback being timely (Q10).

As it turned out, contentment grew on every scale except for organisation and management, which suffered a descent of seven ppts. Here, only half concluded that the timetable worked efficiently (Q16) – a massive fall of 38 ppts. Meanwhile, there was still a little uncertainty as to how student feedback had been acted on (Q25, student voice scale), as a score of 69% was returned.

Yet, it was gratifying to see increases on questions where other courses have struggled:

* IT resources (Q18, learning resources scale): 88% (up by 11 ppts);
* Feel part of a community (Q21, learning community scale): 94 ppts (up by 17 ppts).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes. The feedback loop needs to be closed – if no action has been taken on the back of student opinions, the reasons for this must be communicated to students.

***FdA Learning & Teaching***

In 2018, FdA Learning & Teaching was awarded maximum overall satisfaction, but in a dramatic reversal, this score is now 61%. Indeed, approval collapsed across all scales. As a result, the four, key metrics (overall satisfaction, course teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support), which were each hitting University targets, are now all below their respective threshold values. In amongst the chaos, only 26% thought that feedback to work was timely (Q10, assessment and feedback scale) after a nosedive in approval of 60 ppts; meanwhile, on academic support, less than two-thirds rated the advice on the course (Q13) and on study choices (Q14).

Lowly statistics were also posted on various other questions:

* Well-organised course (Q15, organisation and management scale): 34% (down by 46 ppts);
* IT resources (Q18, learning resources scale): 48% (down by 44 ppts);
* Feel part of a community (Q21, learning community): 53% (down by 41 ppts);
* Clear that feedback has been acted on(Q25, student voice scale): 29% (down by 38 ppts).

Many commenters pointed out the lack of punctuality in receiving feedback to work, which has been ‘late far more often than on time’ and thus ‘impacted upon upcoming assignments’. One also added: “In the second year, assignment briefs have been very brief and unclear.” The other main issue related to regular room changes (including these not being ‘notified in time’), lack of availability and rooms not being big enough for the size of the cohort. Another explained: “There have been issues with room allocation resulting with sessions being cut short or cancelled which is inconvenient when students like me commute.” The lack of support in their second year for assignments left respondents feeling that they had been ‘left to our own devices’, while modules were described as ‘unclear’. To summarise, one was ‘very disappointed’ with the running of the course.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Students must be given timely feedback on their work. Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes. Moreover, the feedback loop needs to be closed – if no action has been taken on the back of student opinions, the reasons for this must be communicated to students. Programme staff should strive to create a better community (e.g. group work, social gatherings, interaction between different years).

### FHS Programmes

***BA Criminal & Corporate Investigation***

For this programme, scores are not available for 2018, so we just contrast against the University as a whole. Overall satisfaction was within a percentage point of the University’s mark, while teaching quality was 2.5 ppts above the institution’s score. However, assessment and feedback is below the University’s threshold, with only half concluding that marking criteria had been clear in advance (Q8). Moreover, academic support was 21 ppts under its threshold figure, as only two-fifths asserted that they had received sufficient course-related guidance (Q13) and three-fifths as regards advice to make study choices (Q14).

Just 40% were satisfied with the organisation and management of the programme, 31 ppts below the University’s statistic. Indeed, two of the scores on this scale were very low:

* Well-organised course (Q15): 10% (54 ppts below the University);
* Communication of changes (Q17): 40% (33 ppts below the University).
* Elsewhere, there was uncertainty as to whether respondents felt part of a community of staff and students, with 60% contentment.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes. Indeed, course changes must be communicated to students at the first opportunity – this is important if a lecture needs to be cancelled. All assignments should have clear and detailed marking rubrics to ensure fair and consistent marking. Staff should reflect on their availability to students to give out advice.

***BA Criminology***

Despite being comfortably below the University’s threshold, overall satisfaction for BA Criminology has improved by 33 ppts from last year. There was a similar tale for the three other, key metrics as teaching rose by 14 ppts, assessment and feedback by 18 ppts and academic support by 14 ppts. Nevertheless, University thresholds are still not being reached. For instance, in academic support, approval of 52% and 55% was given on advice relating to the course (Q13) and study choices on the course (Q14). Moreover, for assessment and feedback, there was less than two-thirds contentment with each of clear marking criteria (Q8), timely feedback (Q9) and helpful comments (Q11).

There were further questions where statistics were below par:

* Well-organised course (Q15, organisation and management scale): 45% (up by 30 ppts);
* Feel part of a community (Q21, learning community scale): 43% (up by 11 ppts);
* Student opinions are valued (Q24, student voice scale): 43% (down by five ppts);
* Clear that feedback has been acted on (Q25, student voice scale): 48% (up by 37 ppts).

Commenters thought that the academic staff were ‘extremely helpful and supportive’, according to one respondent, who added: “They have made my learning … exciting and challenging; I am happy that I have had the opportunity to have been taught by them.” The content was described as ‘very good’ and ‘mostly interesting’. There was also appreciation for students being given the opportunity to ‘express their views’, and that ‘there are a lot of class discussions’. However, the frequent complaint was regarding assessment briefs that provided ‘no clear indication’ of what was required. One sample member said: “There often is little or no support ahead of assignments. There are no briefings or suggestions given … about assignments as people on other courses receive.” We also note that the 2017-18 programme withdrawal rate was a sizeable 35%, with a gap of 19-ppts between white and BAME students.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Assignment briefs should be clearly linked to learning outcomes and be distributed to students. Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes. The feedback loop also needs to be closed, while the withdrawal gap demands further investigation. Programme staff should reflect on their availability to students to give advice.

***BA Policing***

Despite a minor rise from 2018, the overall satisfaction score for BA Policing is still 16 ppts underneath the University’s threshold of 80%. It was a similar story for the three, other key metrics. Indeed, support for course teaching and academic support fell with, in the latter case, 57% showing approval for each of being able to contact staff (Q12), receiving advice regarding the course (Q13) and study choices on the course (Q14). There was, at least, a slight rise in assessment and feedback, caused by a 21-ppt augmentation in the marking criteria being clear (Q9).

Contentment with organisation and management has plummeted to 28 ppts behind the University’s figure, as only 13% thought that the course was well-organised (Q15) and 57% that course changes had been communicated effectively (Q17). Moreover, less than half now feel part of a community (Q21, learning community scale); yet, a meagre 22% could see how student feedback had been acted on (Q25, student voice scale).

The sample were complimentary about the provision of placements. A respondent said: “I … believe there should be more placements put in place early for policing students. [This] allows classroom learning to be adapted into real-life scenarios.” There was also praise for some staff members, who have ‘provided clear support’ – one was described as being ‘outstandingly helpful’.

Yet, there was genuine concern about how module assignments ‘overlapped’ and were not ‘always spread out fairly across the year’. In one case, three assignments were due in ‘within a couple [of] weeks of my dissertation due date’. Furthermore, another said: “Academic supervisors for dissertation work need to work together so they do not tell students contradicting information and mark work differently.” Another described how they had not received replies to emails from their supervisor for at least ‘over a week’ and not received feedback on their dissertation.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Better staff communication is needed to reduce clashes in due dates for assignments. Enhanced promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes. Indeed, course changes must be communicated to students at the first opportunity. The feedback loop also needs to be closed – if no action has been taken on the back of student opinions, the reasons for this must be communicated to students. In addition, the staff email policy needs to be reintroduced and enforced.

***BA Social & Community Development***

Overall satisfaction for BA Social & Community Development descended by 11 ppts to take it below the University’s threshold value. There was better news as regards assessment and feedback, which held its level just above the 80% target; this was despite an eight-ppt drop for fair marking (Q9), with two-thirds now approving. Course teaching edged up a percentage point, but remains just underneath its threshold. However, the score for academic support has now plunged to 65%, caused by a reverse of 26 ppts in students being able to contact staff when required (Q12).

Elsewhere, contentment nosedived on organisation and management; here, a paltry 28% believed the course to be well-organised (Q15) after suffering a fall of 47 ppts, while two-thirds asserted that the timetable was working efficiently (Q16). In addition, only 39% could see how student feedback had been acted on (Q25, student voice scale).

Respondents appreciated the interactive element of the course (e.g. during group work). Another added: “I like how we are taken to places … [and use] our theory for practice. Not just placements, but we're actually taken out to the community as a class.”

However, it was felt that staff sometimes ‘do not reply to emails’, and there was a ‘lack of communication between staff and students’. Moreover, there was an issue with staff leaving during the academic year. One sample member explained: “’[This] forced other lecturers to take over, putting them and the students under more pressure as it became very disorganised and stressful. Besides, we missed out on the opportunity to do placement along with our studies.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Given 86% of known ethnicity on the programme are currently BAME students (across stages), the fair marking issue provides evidence for the introduction of anonymous marking across the institution, where possible. The staff email policy needs to be reintroduced and enforced. Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes. Contingency planning for staff leaving must be considered to minimise disruptions and ensure continuity in programme delivery. The feedback loop also needs to be closed – if no action has been taken on the back of student opinions, the reasons for this must be communicated to students.

***BA Social Work***

Overall satisfaction for BA Social Work increased by 22 ppts from 2018, with its score of 84% now exceeding the University’s threshold. However, the same cannot be said of the three other, key metrics. Although academic support has certainly improved, there remains an issue with advice being available to make study choices (Q14), with less than two-thirds approval. Apropos assessment and feedback, only 46% could recognise clear marking criteria (Q8), while 58% believed that the marking of assignments had been fair (Q9).

The sample were unconvinced as regards organisation and management, with 54% claiming that the course was well-organised (Q15) and 62% that changes had been communicated effectively (Q17). Despite augmentations on both questions, 58% felt part of a community (Q21, learning community scale) and 60% could see how their feedback had been acted on (Q25, student voice scale).

Respondents appreciated the placement opportunities available to gain the ‘relevant experience required for future social work practice’ – indeed, one described these as a ‘massive positive’. There was also praise for the quality of lectures, which were ‘very informative’ and very beneficial’. Another said: “[We have had] great lecturers who are very knowledgeable in their field, clearly have a passion for the course and have the best interest[s] of each student at heart.”

However, there was a problem with the organisation of placements with ‘not enough notice given on where we were going which caused unnecessary stress’, while a couple felt that placements should be graded. Further, the Academic Literacy module was ‘not effectively run and delivered’. There were also requests for the sense of community to be enhanced – for example, through team-building exercises or talking to students at different stages of the programme. PAT meetings were also criticised as either ‘non-existent’ or not ‘effective’.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Assignment briefs should be clearly linked to learning outcomes and be distributed to students. All assignments should have clear and detailed marking rubrics to ensure fair and consistent marking. Course changes must be communicated to students at the first opportunity. Programme staff should strive to create a better community (e.g. group work, social gatherings, interaction between different years), while enhancements could be made to the organisation of placements.

***BA Sociology***

In 2018, BA Sociology posted a maximum overall satisfaction score, but this has tumbled by 23 ppts to below the University’s threshold. In fact, approval dropped on every scale, with assessment and feedback, and academic support also now under their threshold figures. In the former case, only 62% concluded that marking had been fair (Q9), while the statistic for receiving helpful comments (Q11) nosedived by 46 ppts. For academic support, this was, ironically, the same fall as seen for being able to contact staff (Q12) and 62% recognised the advice to make study choices (Q14).

Organisation and management also came in for censure. A 44-ppt descent was apparent on the course being well-organised (Q15); meanwhile, communication of course changes (Q17) only delivered 54% approval. This theme was also repeated for learning resources – together with the perennial fulmination about IT (Q18), the figure for course-specific resources (Q20) declined by 36 ppts to 54% again.

There was much appreciation for the academic staff in the comments, with one describing them as ‘more likes friends than teachers’. Another added: “The staff … are extremely dedicated to help all who want it and will go the extra mile …. It's down to their help and guidance that I have achieved well during my degree and will be continuing on to do a Masters.” Moreover, the course content was referred to as ‘highly entertaining’, ‘engaging’ and ‘very varied’.

Yet, the most common complaint was lack of organisation, caused by ‘staff leaving in the middle of the course’, some lectures being ‘cancelled with very short notice’ and ‘problems with timetabling’. One said that the feedback was ‘not always useful’, while another stated: “Online sessions can be a bit tricky in terms of access.” A third thought that some modules could offer more online content.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Given 48% of known ethnicity on the programme are currently BAME students (across stages), the fair marking issue provides evidence for the introduction of anonymous marking across the institution, where possible. Programme staff should offer clear feedback with explanations on how students can improve, while the staff email policy needs to be reintroduced and enforced. Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes. Contingency planning for staff leaving must be considered to minimise disruptions and ensure continuity in programme delivery.

***BA Sport Development & Physical Education***

For this programme, scores are not available for 2018, so we just contrast against the University as a whole. 93% of respondents were satisfied with the course overall after a 12-ppt improvement, taking it beyond the University’s target. A homogenous situation was evident for teaching quality and academic support – for the former, three of the four questions achieved maximum approval. However, assessment and feedback is below its recommended threshold of 73%, as a result of seven and 16-ppt differentials between the University and the course on fair marking (Q9) and timely feedback on work (Q10).

There were inadequate scores on other scales too:

* Well-organised course (Q15, organisation and management scale): 50% (14 ppts below the University);
* Communication of changes (Q17, organisation and management scale): 50% (23 ppts below the University);
* Feel part of a community (Q21, learning community scale): 43% (25 ppts below the University);
* Clear that feedback has been acted on(Q25, student voice scale): 57% (3 ppts below the University).

It should also be mentioned that next-stage progression in 2017-18 for this programme was a worrying 58% overall, with the rate being 43 ppts higher for white than BAME students.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Students must be given timely feedback on their work. Course changes must be communicated to students at the first opportunity. Programme staff should strive to create a better community (e.g. group work, social gatherings, interaction between different years). The progression rate for BAME students may require further investigation.

***BSc Adult Nursing***

There was a negligible growth in overall satisfaction for BSc Adult Nursing, which now stands at 85%. It was a similar story for the three other, key metrics – course teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support. In the latter case however, the rise of six ppts took it above the University’s threshold. Meanwhile, the statistic for fair marking (Q9, assessment and feedback scale) remains at 71% and thus has room for improvement.

At 62%, the sample were unconvinced that the course had run smoothly (Q15, organisation and management scale), while less than 60% could see how student feedback had been acted on (Q25, student voice). Further, in 2017-18, there was a 12-ppt attainment gap in receiving good degrees between white students and their BAME counterparts. Indeed, as a negative, one BAME respondent simply wrote: “Prejudice.”

In the comments, much of the discussion related to placements. The sample appreciated these opportunities, with one describing them as the ‘best part [of the course] and most valuable’. Another thought that they were ‘varied and provide good insight relevant to the course’.

However, there was much consternation about clashes between placements and due dates. One respondent explained: “Academic assignments are given during practice placements whilst, at other times, we have five months of neither assignments or placements.” Another added: “The pressures of having assignments while on placement can be off-putting and make you feel like giving up.” Moreover, there was a feeling of disorganisation as placements were communicated to students ‘two days before’ or even ‘not allocated in time’. Respondents disagreed about the support given on placements; while some thought this had been ‘really good’, others called it ‘patchy’ – one said: “The mentors are very busy so have no time to give you support and guidance.” It was also noted that ‘mentors were expecting us to know things in Year 2 that we only learnt in Year 3’; having some ‘clinical skills before starting placement’ was requested.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: The attainment gap provides evidence for the introduction of anonymous marking across the institution, where possible. Staff must reduce clashes between due dates and placements. Indeed, students must be given sufficient notice ahead of their placements, while staff should reflect on whether students require further knowledge before starting their placement.

***BSc Children’s Nursing***

A 21-ppt advance was witnessed in overall satisfaction for BSc Children’s Nursing, taking it above the University’s threshold. This trend was repeated for both teaching on my course and academic support – in the latter case, approval as regards respondents receiving advice to make study choices (Q14) increased by 20 ppts from last year. However, assessment and feedback continues to struggle, and this has now slipped further behind its threshold; here, only 58% concluded that marking had been fair (Q9), while 63% thought that the marking criteria had been clear in advance (Q8).

Meanwhile, the organisation and management scale is still performing below par:

* Well-organised course (Q15): 58% (up by 11 ppts);
* Efficient timetabling (Q16): 67% (down by five ppts);
* Communication of changes (Q17): 63% (down by four ppts).

Respondents were complimentary towards the academic staff, who were ‘very supportive’ and ‘always there for you’. In addition, the placement opportunities were described as ‘amazing’ and ‘really enjoyable’. One said: “The support within [the] University and when you are on placement is second to none. The placements are varied and give great learning opportunities.”

Despite this, the course was often seen as ‘disorganised’. Students felt that placements were ‘not always allocated with enough notice’, and occasionally ‘far from home addresses’. Indeed, one sample member said: “The University provides placements with the wrong dates or have not let placements know that we will be attending.” Other organisational issues were that ‘marking is very inconsistent’, ‘assignment guidelines are not helpful’ and ‘changes to the timetable are announced very late and don't always reach students’. It was noted that PebblePad is ‘not user friendly for the mentors who don't have enough time to fill it in, as well as [completing] their day-to-day activities.’

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Students must be given the correct details and sufficient notice of their placements. All assignments should have clear and detailed marking rubrics to ensure fair and consistent marking. Assignment briefs should be clearly linked to learning outcomes and be distributed to students. Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes.

***BSc Human Bioscience***

The statistic for overall satisfaction in BSc Human Bioscience rocketed by 26 ppts from last year to now hit 100%. Indeed, support rose on every scale and, as a result, scores universally exceeded those for the institution as a whole. Furthermore, course teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support have all attained their University targets; indeed, for academic support, every question attained maximum approval, with the figure for good advice to make study choices (Q14) rising by 44 ppts. Meanwhile, fair marking (Q9) on the assessment and feedback scale recorded a lowly 58% in 2018, but this number is now 82%.

There was also pleasing news regarding learning resources:

* IT resources (Q18): 82% (up by 29 ppts);
* Library resources (Q19): 91% (up by 22 ppts);
* Course-specific resources (Q20): 82% (up by 19 ppts).

In fact, there was only one question where contentment fell – this related to staff being good at explaining things (Q1, teaching on my course scale), which dropped by eight ppts to 82%. Moreover, we note that, according to the latest DLHE data, the rate of graduate-level employment within six months of qualifying was only 39%, but 94% were in work and/or further study.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Given the high attainment in, for example, course teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support, staff should consider sharing best practice with other programmes.

***BSc Mental Health Nursing***

There was an 11-ppt drop from 2018 in overall satisfaction for BSc Mental Health Nursing, which took the programme below the University’s threshold. Problems were also witnessed on the three other, key metrics, with teaching quality and academic support also under their respective thresholds. The latter suffered a 19-ppt collapse in rating, as now less than two-thirds claimed that they had received sufficient advice on their course (Q13) or study choices related to the course (Q14). Meanwhile, the statistic for teaching was hampered by a fall of 18 ppts as to whether the course was intellectually stimulating (Q3). On assessment and feedback, 65% thought that the marking criteria were clear (Q8), two ppts more than the figure for fair marking (Q9).

Despite organisation and management improving, just over half asserted that the course was well-organised (Q15); for student voice, 61% opined that student feedback had been acted on (Q25).

Respondents appreciated the range of placement opportunities available – indeed, one said: “[My positive] is [the] more experience [gained] especially in placement, which has helped me to be more competent and confident.” Another added: “The course was extremely informative, and the placements enabled me to develop my skills.”

However, there were several complaints regarding students finding out about placements too late. One said: “Numerous times, I found out my placement area later than my peers did which was frustrating, when being a single parent and I also found my location was also not taken into account.” On a slightly different theme, another added: “Sometimes, you are given a place to go, you prepare, and you do your learning objective and then, a week before placement, you are told you have been moved to a different place.” Other points raised included deadline clashes, ‘last-minute’ changes to timetables and unclear marking criteria. Someone also suggested that marking could be made more fair with a system similar to anonymous marking.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: The fair marking issue provides evidence for the introduction of anonymous marking across the institution, where possible. Students must be given the correct details and sufficient notice of their placements. Assignment briefs should be clearly linked to learning outcomes and be distributed to students. Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes.

***BSc Midwifery***

For BSc Midwifery, overall satisfaction enhanced by 22 ppts, and is now just shy of the University’s target of 90%. Improvements were also witnessed on the other, key metrics, with two of these – course teaching, and assessment and feedback – now hitting their respective targets. For the former, 97% now concluded that staff give good explanations (Q1), after a rise of 16 ppts; regarding the latter, 94% asserted that feedback had been timely (Q10), but there was more scepticism (67%) as to whether these comments were helpful (Q11). Academic support was slightly held back by a 15-ppt decline in being able to contact staff (Q12).

Approval for organisation and management was the lowest of any scale, as outlined below:

* Well-organised course (Q15): 47% (up by six ppts);
* Efficient timetabling (Q16): 62% (down by 12 ppts);
* Communication of changes (Q17): 56% (down by seven ppts).

Personal academic tutors (PAT) were praised by respondents as being ‘exceptional’ for the support they had offered. Indeed, one PAT ‘attended placement on a regular basis to check how students' progress was’. The experience of placements has ‘always been positive’, with one sample member describing them as ‘well-organised’.

However, each timetable is ‘rarely delivered promptly’ and ‘often changes’, which has ‘not been adequate’. One respondent explained: “Getting timetables one working day before is not helpful and resulted in making childcare arrangements extremely difficult.” Furthermore, room allocation is referred to in the comments as ‘not fit for purpose’. Another stated: “Due to the size of our cohort, the facilities aren't suitable …; therefore, students have to sit on the floor for our lectures.” A third added: “[We] cannot use the Midwifery lab for classes because other courses have been given priority of the room … This has truly impacted on our learning.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes. Course changes must be communicated to students at the first opportunity. Room allocation must factor in the size of the cohort – students needing to sit on the floor for lectures is not acceptable.

***BSc Occupational Therapy***

There was a reverse of five ppts in overall satisfaction from last year for BSc Occupational Therapy – however, its statistic of 85% still remains above that for the University. Indeed, approval also fell for course teaching, academic support, and assessment and feedback. Nevertheless, the latter is still hitting its University target, despite a 14-ppt drop in the score for fair marking (Q9). Regarding academic support, all respondents were satisfied with being able to contact staff (Q12) in 2018; now, this statistic now stands at 75%.

Support slipped back on every scale other than learning opportunities, which was boosted by 98% concluding that they had been able to bring ideas together from different topics (Q6). The sample was also uncertain about the programme’s organisation and management, with contentment declining in each of the scale’s three questions by at least 12 ppts.

The provision of placements was recognised by the sample. One said: “There has been an opportunity to evolve outside of the classroom, which has been a great experience. All the placements I have completed have been extremely positive and great learning environments.” Another added: “The lecturers gave us opportunities, where possible, to see OT put into practice and regularly gave us opportunities to meet patients and understand their lived experience.” Respondents also appreciated the communication about placements.

On the negative side, one respondent opined: “When we are on full-time placement … on top of any work from our educator, I do not think the University should be setting extra tasks for the next module. It is overload.” Moreover, the ‘unreliable’ marking was questioned. Another said: “Every time I submit a project or assignment, I have absolutely no idea of how I will perform academically as every tutor grades so differently. There is a massive lack of consistency.” Room organisation has been ‘very difficult’, while ‘lectures have frequently been cancelled or pushed back’. In 2017-18, there was also a 23-ppt gap in withdrawal rates between white and BAME students.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: All assignments should have clear and detailed marking rubrics to ensure fair and consistent marking. Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of lecture changes. Staff must reduce clashes between due dates and placements, while the BAME withdrawal rate may require investigation.

***BSc Paramedic Science***

There was a surge of 12 ppts as regards overall satisfaction with BSc Paramedic Science to take it beyond the University’s target. For the other, key metrics, a negligible fall on course teaching was witnessed, but this scale still is hitting its own target. Academic support was hampered by a score under the 80% mark for receiving sufficient course guidance (Q13). However, only 58% approved of assessment and feedback, with the individual questions rated as follows:

* Clear marking criteria (Q8): 44% (down by ten ppts);
* Fair marking (Q9): 78% (down by four ppts);
* Timely feedback (Q10): 44% (down by 28 ppts);
* Helpful comments (Q11): 67% (down by 15 ppts).

Moreover, after receiving maximum satisfaction in 2018, only 56% could now say that they felt part of a community (Q21), while there was a 23-ppt decline in contentment with whether it was apparent that student feedback had been acted on (Q25). In organisation and management, a little equivocation was evident, as each question scored less than three-quarters.

It is also worth mentioning that, in 2017-18, 80% of female students progressed – a statistic that was 30 ppts better than their male counterparts.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: All assignments should have clear and detailed marking rubrics to ensure fair and consistent marking. Students must be given timely feedback on their work. Moreover, the feedback loop needs to be closed – if no action has been taken on the back of student opinions, the reasons for this must be communicated to students. Programme staff should strive to create a better community (e.g. group work, social gatherings, interaction between different years).

***BSc Podiatry***

In 2018, BSc Podiatry attained maximum overall satisfaction, and it repeated the trick this time around. Indeed, the three, other key metrics are also beyond their University targets too. Regarding course teaching, all respondents concluded that the programme was intellectually stimulating (Q3), while on academic support, the same was seen for being able to contact staff (Q12) after a six-ppt rise. Yet, there was a slight reversal on assessment and feedback, as approval for receiving helpful comments on work (Q11) dropped to 81%.

Unlike other programmes, respondents praised the organisation and management highly, with the entire sample believing the course to be well-organised (Q15). Meanwhile, on learning resources, contentment with access to course-specific resources (Q20) dropped by 13 ppts. Also, below three-quarters could detect how student feedback had been acted on (Q25, student voice scale).

As one would expect given the above, commenters were extremely positive. The staff were variously descried as ‘nice and helpful’, as well as ‘very knowledgeable and experienced’. They have also maintained a ‘close relationship with students’. One said: “Despite the new changes at the University, podiatry lecturers have maintained student-lecturers contact, which is vital in such practical courses. Extra time is provided for students, especially if one is academically challenged.”

The practical experience gained was also recognised. One explained: “The opportunity to [attend] the Leicester dissection in [the] 3rd year is very helpful as a refresher to anatomy.” Another added: “The variety of clinics and placement[s] throughout the 2nd & 3rd year is brilliant – we get lots of experience and clinical practice!” Furthermore, appreciation was shown for a ‘variety of different ways of learning’, which has ‘helped to make learning fun’. On the course structure, a sample member wrote: “I like the fact [that] there are no assignments in the third year as the dissertation is the main piece of work [then].” Another simply concluded: “I couldn't fault the course.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Given the high attainment in, for example, teaching, academic support, and organisation and management, staff should consider sharing best practice with other programmes.

***BSc Psychology***

Overall satisfaction for BSc Psychology dropped below the University’s threshold following a seven-ppt descent from last year. Meanwhile, teaching quality, assessment and feedback, and academic support are all beneath their respective threshold figures. No question on assessment and feedback claimed approval in excess of 70%, with clear marking criteria (Q9) plummeting by 13 ppts and timely feedback, despite an improvement, only reaching a score of 57%. Just over half expressed contentment with advice being available to make study choices (Q14, academic support scale).

With the exception of student voice, statistics decreased on every scale. This was most noticeable for organisation and management, where the figures for being well-organised (Q15) and communication of changes (Q17) fell by 15 ppts and 20 ppts respectively.

These problems were outlined in the comments, with aspects of the course seen as ‘disorganised’ and ‘chaotic’. Many expressed their frustration about not being able to contact staff. One referred to this as ‘very difficult’, while another said: “When you email members of staff, it takes them a long time to reply or they don't reply at all. It is difficult to meet with a member of staff as you don't know where they are.” When staff have left, the changes have not always been communicated in ‘a reasonable time’. One added: “There were … issues around [the] dissertation as a bunch of staff resigned and no-one bothered to explain what happens now to the students who lost their mentor.”

Others bemoaned the marking criteria as ‘considerably vague’, making assignments ‘confusing’. However, more significant was the ‘very late’ feedback to work, with ‘little communication regarding the delay’. One asserted: “There were [an] instance where grade release was delayed for almost two months without any actual reason given or without an apology.” Another thought the situation was ‘absolutely atrocious’. Even then, the feedback was seen as being ‘inadequate’ and ‘quite poor’. Moreover, in 2017-18, the programme had a worrying BAME attainment gap of 34 ppts.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: The staff email policy needs to be reintroduced and enforced. Contingency planning for staff leaving must be considered to minimise disruptions, with prompt communications made to students. Timely feedback to work must be given, while assignment briefs should be clearly linked to learning outcomes and be distributed to students. The attainment gap provides evidence for the introduction of anonymous marking across the institution, where possible.

***BSc Psychology & Counselling***

An improvement of eight ppts has taken overall satisfaction for BSc Psychology & Counselling to beyond the University’s 90% target. Course teaching has seen a slight enhancement, despite only two-thirds finding the course to be intellectually stimulating (Q3). However, both assessment and feedback, and academic support have experienced a dip, with both now below the threshold figures. For the latter, there was a 17-ppt decline for advice being available to make study choices (Q14); but, for the former, the scores were indifferent:

* Clear marking criteria (Q8): 75% (up by four ppts);
* Fair marking (Q9): 58% (down by four ppts);
* Timely feedback (Q10): 58% (down by eight ppts);
* Helpful comments (Q11): 67% (down by eight ppts).

Meanwhile, only 67% concluded that they felt part of a community (Q21, learning community scale).

Respondents praised staff for their support in the comments – one said: “Some staff were great, and it felt like they really cared about how I was doing, and wanted me to achieve a good result.” Another recognised the ‘good integration of different modules’, as well as the ‘opportunity to work in the community’. A third found it helpful to have different guest lecturers.

However, tardy marking and feedback was a problem, which ‘took months sometimes’. One explained: “[I] didn't receive a first grade back until January after having to submit a further three assignments so [I] don't know how to change or improve.” Another bemoaned the lack of communication, continuing: “We would be okay with delays in marking if we were told about them, rather than kept in the dark.” On a similar theme, a third added: “It is a shame that contacting tutors was not as easy in [the] first or second year as it is in [the] third year.” Moreover, in 2017-18, the difference in good degrees between white and BAME students was 12 ppts.

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** The staff email policy needs to be reintroduced and enforced, while timely feedback to work must be given. The attainment gap and issue with fair marking provide evidence for the introduction of anonymous marking across the institution, where possible – this is important given 48% of known ethnicity on the programme are currently BAME students (across stages).

***BSc Sport & Exercise Science***

An impressive swelling of 18 ppts took overall satisfaction for BSc Sport & Exercise Science above the University’s target. There were similar improvements for both teaching quality, and assessment and feedback which achieved the same result; on the latter scale, 86% concluded that marking of work had been fair (Q9) – a statistic that has rocketed by 20 ppts from 2018. However, approval for academic support only rose by a single percentage point, as the score for receiving good advice to make study choices (Q14) fell by seven ppts to 71%.

Despite enhancements elsewhere, learning resources was the one scale where contentment dropped. Its individual question scores were:

* IT resources (Q18): 50% (down by 33 ppts);
* Library resources (Q19): 93% (up by 19 ppts);
* Course-specific resources (Q20): 64% (down by 23 ppts).

In 2017-18, this programme did have a relatively-high withdrawal rate of 25% - more worryingly, whereas no white students withdrew, 34% of BAME students did. Furthermore, the most recent DLHE indicates that a slightly disappointing 46% were in graduate employment six months after qualifying (although this figure has increased by 26 ppts within two years and 94% were in work and/or further study).

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: The BAME withdrawal rate may require investigation. Programme staff should reflect on the sufficiency of course resources.

***CertHE Mental Health***

Regrettably, overall satisfaction for CertHE Mental Health has collapsed by 18 ppts from last year, and, at 67%, is now comfortably below the University’s threshold. Moreover, reductions were also seen on the three other, key metrics; despite teaching quality being fractionally under its threshold, that was not the case for assessment and feedback, and academic support. For the former, figures of only 57% and 62% were posted for feedback being timely (Q10) and helpful (Q11) respectively. Meanwhile, academic support struggled due to no question on its scale posting more than two-thirds contentment – for instance, being able to contact staff (Q12) dropped by seven ppts.

The scale which suffered the most precipitous drop was organisation and management:

* Well-organised course (Q15): 48% (down by 22 ppts);
* Efficient timetabling (Q16): 76% (down by 16 ppts);
* Communication of changes (Q17): 52% (down by 25 ppts).

Respondents were impressed by the course content, which was ‘very informative and educative’. One said: “The course really made me … have more confidence in myself while working with my clinical team at work.”

Yet, organisation was a problem, as lecturers ‘either did not show or changed things at the last moment’. Meanwhile, one said: “During the last module, the learning outcomes were changed twice, so by the end …, we had three different learning outcomes that made the whole module confusing.” Another added: “My last module was very disorganised due to changes of assignment questions a few times. This caused unnecessary hassle for the majority [of] students who had started working on their assignment.” But communication with staff was also difficult – one explained: “The personal tutors assigned to us were very hard to contact and always seemed to have very limited time for the student group …, meaning I became reluctant to even try to utilise them for advice.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: The staff email policy needs to be reintroduced and enforced. Timely feedback to work must be given, which should be clear and offer explanations on how students can improve. Assignment briefs/questions must not be changed after students have begun the assignment. Course changes must be communicated to students at the first opportunity.

***FdSc Dental Nursing***

There was a dramatic reversal in fortunes regarding overall satisfaction for FdSc Dental Nursing – for after being below the University’s threshold last year, it is now hitting its target of 90%. A homogenous picture was seen for course teaching, which was boosted by a 25-ppt rise in the challenge of the course (Q4) to attain maximum approval on this question. The scores for each question in academic support augmented, despite only two-thirds still perceiving that advice was available to make study choices (Q14). Yet, progress for assessment and feedback was stymied by a 16-ppt drop in contentment for timely feedback (Q10), while scepticism was also posited (69%) as to whether the comments had been helpful (Q11).

Other than the Students’ Union, assessment and feedback was only the scale where satisfaction descended. Indeed, the statistic for organisation and management swiftly grew, with the figures for each individual question rising by at least 20 ppts. However, we notice two further questions where there was more equivocation:

IT resources (Q18, learning resources scale): 67% (up by four ppts);

Opportunities to give feedback (Q23, student voice scale): 69% (down by six ppts).

Meanwhile, the withdrawal rate for the programme has been consistently high since 2015-16 and now stands at 30% – a statistic that is 22 ppts above the University’s threshold.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Students must be given timely feedback on their work. Moreover, this feedback should be clear, with explanations on how students can improve in future assignments. The feedback loop also needs to be closed – if no action has been taken on the back of student opinions, the reasons for this must be communicated to students. The high withdrawal rate may require further investigation.

***FdSc Health & Social Care***

A rise of five ppts was enough to take overall satisfaction for FdSc Health & Social Care above the University’s target. Indeed, the three other, key metrics are attaining their respective targets. On teaching quality, the sample awarded maximum approval on three of the scale’s four questions. Assessment and feedback suffered a minor drop, caused by a 15-ppt decrease on marking criteria being clear in advance (Q8) from its perfect score in 2018. However, academic support improved by a percentage point, with 100% now receiving sufficient advice about their course (Q13).

On a scale where other programmes have stumbled, the results for organisation and management were of a very high standard:

* Well-organised course (Q15): 100% (up by 13 ppts);
* Efficient timetabling (Q16): 100% (up by 20 ppts);
* Communication of changes (Q17): 92% (up by 12 ppts).

However, in the only question where the sample was uncertain, two-thirds asserted that they could see how student feedback had been acted on (Q25, student voice scale). Moreover, the course had a progression rate in 2017-18 of just 29%. Further to this point, the withdrawal rate was a concerning 21 ppts above the University’s threshold, with a gap of 11 ppts between non-disabled and disabled students.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: The poor progression and withdrawal rates may require further investigation. The feedback loop also needs to be closed – if no action has been taken on the back of student opinions, the reasons for this must be communicated to students.

***FdSc Paramedic Science***

In 2018, FdSc Paramedic Science achieved maximum overall satisfaction; yet, this time around, it fell by 20 ppts and is on the cusp of the University’s threshold. Declines were also apparent on course teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support, with the latter two dropping below their respective thresholds. For the former, only 65% perceived the marking criteria to be clear (Q8), while there was a 24-ppt decrease in approval for fair marking (Q9); regarding the latter, contentment on good advice to make study choices (Q14) plummeted by 28 ppts.

The issues with organisation and management were particularly pronounced:

* Well-organised course (Q15): 50% (up by 13 ppts);
* Efficient timetabling (Q16): 60% (down by 28 ppts);
* Communication of changes (Q17): 63% (down by 12 ppts).

Furthermore, there was uncertainty on other questions:

Course-specific resources (Q20, learning resources scale): 60% (down by 34 ppts);

Feel part of a community (Q21, learning community scale): 65% (down by 29 ppts);

Clear that feedback has been acted on (Q25, student voice scale): 60% (up by ten ppts).

The programme’s progression rate in 2017-18 was also five ppts underneath the University’s threshold, with this proportion being higher for female than male students by 30 ppts.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: All assignments should have clear and detailed marking rubrics to ensure fair and consistent marking. Course changes must be communicated to students at the first opportunity. Better promotion of the MyNorthampton app to staff is required, so that they send out notifications to students in the event of room changes. The feedback loop also needs to be closed – if no action has been taken on the back of student opinions, the reasons for this must be communicated to students. Programme staff should reflect on the sufficiency of course resources.

***JH Criminology and Psychology***

Despite a negligible fall from the previous year, overall satisfaction for JH Criminology and Psychology remains above the University’s threshold. Meanwhile, course teaching is less than 0.5 ppts from attaining its target, as all respondents found the course intellectually stimulating (Q3). However, assessment and feedback has now descended to below 60%, with scores as follows:

* Clear marking criteria (Q8): 58% (up by 12 ppts);
* Fair marking (Q9): 58% (down by 11 ppts);
* Timely feedback (Q10): 42% (down by 12 ppts);
* Helpful comments (Q11): 75% (down by two ppts).

Also below its threshold is academic support, with less than three-fifths concluding that advice was available to make study choices (Q14). Moreover, only 42% believed the programme to be well-organised (Q15, organisation and management scale), after a regress of 28 ppts.

A couple of respondents outlined differences between Psychology and Criminology. Both praised the former, declaring to be ‘extremely happy … with the Psychology department and modules’; however, Criminology faced a criticism at its staff, while one said: “Some of the modules do not feel that they will help me in my exams and criminological understanding.”

Another added: “Feedback is not timely, and for a specific course, the assessment structure was very unclear and that will influence people's grades.” One sample member felt that Joint Honours students ‘do not get the same opportunities, knowledge and teaching’ as their Single Honours counterparts. They continued: “Single Honours Psychology students had a mini-dissertation in their second year for an assignment; however, Joint Honours students were never given this practice due to the limited Psychology courses we do.”

**RECOMMENDATIONS**: Assignment briefs should be clearly linked to learning outcomes and be distributed to students. All assignments should have clear and detailed marking rubrics to ensure fair and consistent marking. Students must be given timely feedback on their work. Course changes must be communicated to students at the first opportunity. Staff should reflect on the possible perception of Joint Honours students not receiving the advantages of Single Honours students.

### Student Comments

Outside of comments made about their respective programmes, respondents also identified more general concerns. Two of the most prevalent are considered below.

***IT***

Issues with IT have been noted for individual programmes. Yet, further to this, one respondent on an Architecture, Photography and Design course (FAST) noted that some required software was only received in the ‘middle of the year’. Another in the Journalism, Media and Performance subject field (FAST) added: “Computers have the old version of [Adobe] Premiere Pro, [which] needs to be updated.” A third taking a Marketing and Entrepreneurship course (FBL) thought that students ‘shouldn't have to pay’ for Adobe software on campus.

Access to Wi-Fi on campus and NELSON was also criticised by many – while the former was described as ‘poor [so] making it difficult to use … university spaces’, the latter had been ‘awful to work with, constantly signing users out’. Moreover, a BSc Adult Nursing respondent added: “Half the links on NELSON do not work or are out-of-date.”

***Parking***

It was unsurprising that respondents across faculties raged at the parking situation on Waterside. The first gripe was that students now need to pay £8 per day if they wish to park in the town centre. Several sample members termed this as ‘ridiculous’, with one stating: “Bearing in mind we contribute £9,000 a year each to this institution, I think it highly unfair and disrespectful to have been treated with such [a] lack of understanding and consideration, especially in [our] final year.”

An option would be for students to use the park-and-ride, but this also attracted disapproval. The location of the park-and-ride is ‘quite a distance from the university’ and thus ‘not fit for many students, only having the one site on one side of the town’. Another respondent explained: “For me, [the park-and-ride] would mean travelling double the distance to university and adding on almost an hour to my travel just to get to campus.”

But perhaps the most compelling condemnation was the effect this was having on commuter students. Indeed, many of these commuters will be aged 21 or over, who currently make up 48% of Northampton’s undergraduate population in the faculties.7 A selection of comments is given below:

“Having one two-hour lecture per day is not time-effective. It would be better to have more lectures on one day to help students travelling in from afar.”

– BSc Geography (FAST) respondent

“Since the move to Waterside, [the] University is no longer suitable for working parents or those with caring responsibilities. They have lost a great USP without … car parking on site. It has been incredibly difficult to attend all my lectures due to the difficulties with transport.”

– Marketing & Entrepreneurship (FBL) respondent

“No parking at the University campus (free or otherwise) has made the final year difficult when trying to focus on [my] dissertation. It made the commute longer and harder, which took time and focus away from [my] studies.”

– BA History (FEH) respondent

“I commute to the University each day ... I chose Northampton over another university as parking on campus was available. This has been a hindrance.”

– Sport, Exercise and Life Science (FHS) respondent

“I feel getting to university is important, and I have purposefully not gone into the new campus and used the facilities on study days because of the parking issues, instead, staying at home and accessing the online library.”

– Bachelor of Science in Adult Nursing (FHS) respondent

“Lack of student parking, especially students who travel over an hour-and-a-half to get to a two-hour lecture, is extremely discouraging, especially when walking past car parks that are mostly empty.”

– Bachelor of Science in Psychology (FHS) respondent.

The pertinence of this is clear, particularly given recent research which revealed that commuter students could be more likely to withdraw from university, if their travel time is high.[[10]](#footnote-10)

## Office for Students Priorities

The OfS receives an annual guidance letter from the Department for Education, outlining the nature of its work for the coming year (together with the amount of money to be distributed to institutions for teaching).

Published in February 2019, the latest letter sets out, *inter alia*, the following priorities for the OfS:

To work with institutions to tackle non-continuation rates, especially among disadvantaged and underrepresented groups of students (with the key demographics being disabled, white working-class and BAME students);

* To continue focussing on wellbeing, mental health, welfare and harassment/hate crime in relation to improving the student experience (including how students from disadvantaged backgrounds or with at least one protected characteristic are affected);
* To conduct independent reviews of governance structures at institutions, where the salaries of senior staff have resulted in concerns;
* To investigate cases of possible financial mismanagement or fraud, and to take swift action if public funds are at risk;
* To report on the quality of student protection plans at institutions;
* Potentially, to publish student outcomes five years after graduation using Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data (the OfS has done this with Unistats, but only for three years). [[11]](#footnote-11)

Further to this, a supplementary letter was subsequently sent, identifying additional priorities:

* To challenge providers where demonstrable evidence of artificial grade inflation is discovered;
* To support and challenge institutions to eradicate essay-writing services;
* To investigate the rise in unconditional offers (and particularly conditional unconditional offers);
* Given this increase, to review whether existing admissions procedures are in the best interests of students.[[12]](#footnote-12)

In what follows, we consider some of these priorities in relation to the University of Northampton.

### Continuation Rates

Across Northampton’s faculties, FEH was the only one (also including the overall figure) to have a continuation rate (among full-time, first-year undergraduates) in 2017-18 beyond the University’s threshold figure of 88%.[[13]](#footnote-13) Those below the benchmark are marked by a hashed bar in the chart below, with only the 2017-18 scores marked. Moreover, there is a nine-ppt differential between this statistic and that for FAST. Further to this, FAST’s score was at a three-year low – the solitary faculty where this was the case.

We can delve further into continuation rates using the OfS’s access and participation data dashboard (with the latest data published in March 2019).[[14]](#footnote-14) Here, full-time undergraduates are considered for various demographics, and compared to all English providers.

***Age***

When comparing young and mature students, little variation is seen in the English sector figures since 2012-13, but the differences in rates are consistently statistically significant. Yet, in complete contrast, the Northampton gap is now -2.5 ppts, i.e. a higher continuation rate for mature than young. Indeed, while there has been a recent upturn in the rate for the former, the latter has consistently declined since 2013-14, and is now five ppts below the sector figure.

***Disability***

There has been a negligible reverse of 0.5 ppts across the sector since 2012-13 between the rates for students with no-known disability and those who are disabled (although the gaps have been consistently statistically significant). At Northampton, there was a point (2013-14) where upon the continuation rate was marginally loftier for disabled students, but the margin is now two ppts in favour of their non-disabled counterparts. As it turns out, the continuation rates for both demographics have incrementally ebbed away in Northampton since 2013-14, with that for disabled students plummeting by six ppts.

Additionally, there were two disability types where the discrepancy in the latest rates was an especial problem. Indeed, the differences for both students with a mental health condition and a social/communication impairment are clearly above the overall figures (even if based on small sample sizes) – in the latter case, by 13 ppts. Nevertheless, while neither Northampton gap is statistically significant, that is the case for those with a mental health condition in the sector.

***Ethnicity***

The variation in continuation rates for white and BAME students for Northampton and sector-wide is now almost identical. However, intriguingly, in 2013-14, the rate for BAME students at Northampton was two ppts higher. What has happened since then is a seven-ppt rate descent which has produced a figure of 86% for this demographic. Nevertheless, again, while the Northampton differences are at no stage statistically significant, the opposite is true for the sector consistently.

***POLAR***

Over the last five years, there has been a lucid, statistically significant gap across the sector in rates between quintiles 5 and 1 apropos POLAR (currently five ppts). In 2014-15 at Northampton, there was a sudden incline to now match the overall figure (without the margin being significant). Moreover, the Northampton continuation rates for quintiles 5 and 1 are both identically behind (four ppts) the concomitant sector numbers.

***Sex***

Considering both Northampton and the sector overall, there was only one occasion in the last five years where the continuation rate for males exceeded that for females (Northampton, 2013-14). In fact, the Northampton gap between male and female students is now -8 ppts, and crucially, this is a statistically significant figure (the sector margins were statistically significant throughout). Furthermore, the 2016-17 rate for male, Northampton students was 84%, five points adrift of the sector statistic.

### Wellbeing and Mental Health

Unquestionably, wellbeing and mental health amongst the student population are among the most prominent and prevalent issues that the sector currently faces. Perhaps the scale of the problem was best illustrated from comprehensive research conducted by the Insight Network and Dig-In earlier this year.

Surveying more than 37,500 students across UK universities, they found that in excess of 20% had been diagnosed with a mental health condition (typically, relating to depression or anxiety), with beyond three-quarters of these being currently affected. Furthermore, thoughts of self-harm had nearly doubled from reported rates in 2017, while approaching 50% declared that they had used alcohol or recreational drugs as a coping mechanism for their difficulties.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Furthermore, a study by Wonkhe into student loneliness identified that 16% of respondents felt alone each day, with this figure deteriorating among disabled, BAME and international students. Alarmingly, almost a quarter (23%) thought that, if they needed help, either there would be no-one there for them or were at least unsure. The researchers were also able to make a nexus between loneliness and poor wellbeing/mental health, together with alluding to how the situation is ameliorated by involvement in student activities (such as sports clubs, societies and events).[[16]](#footnote-16)

Unfortunately, there are no specific questions relating to wellbeing and mental health in the main set of NSS questions, with only the question relating to being part of a community (Q21, learning community scale) coming close to this.

However, we can analyse the Northampton breakdown of the wellbeing questions within this year’s Student Academic Experience Survey, provided by Advance HE and the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) to gain further understanding. These questions attracted 373 Northampton respondents (full-time undergraduates), with the sample asked to rate on a scale from 10 to 0.

When quizzed on how content they are with their life, there was little to choose between Northampton and the overall UK picture. Indeed, by a margin of a mere one ppt, the sector deemed that they were more likely to not be satisfied (aggregating scores between 0 and 4).

A homogenous picture was apparent regarding the value of the things in each respondent’s life. Yet, this time, there was a lucid differential (six ppts) in favour of Northampton on such things being perceived as worthwhile (scores of either 9 or 10).

Northampton and sector respondents concurred on whether they were unhappy yesterday (scores between 0 and 4), with both returning a statistic of 15%. Meanwhile, a minor Northampton advantage (two ppts) was evident among those who were completely happy (score of 10 only).

However, the news relating to feelings of anxiety was much more troubling from Northampton’s perspective. Indeed, its respondents considered themselves to be more anxious (scores of between 6 and 10) than the sector by five ppts. If we discount those that replied with a ‘6’, this margin then augments to eight ppts.

It was also found that Northampton sample members would prefer (by five ppts) for the University not to get in touch with a parent/guardian(s) if there was worry about a student’s mental health. But note that this question attracted far fewer responses than those contemplated above.

As alluded to in the report for the 2019 Student Academic Experience Survey[[17]](#footnote-17), the scores for the first four questions can be put into context against those from the general UK population, aged 20-24, which is measured by the Office for National Statistics (ONS)[[18]](#footnote-18). The contrast is stark, with the overall youth population comfortably ahead on each scale – including by more than double apropos low anxiety. Indeed, on this particular metric, previous iterations of the Student Academic Experience Survey evince that this figure has gradually descended by five ppts overall since 2016.

In an attempt to tackle the problem nationally, the Department for Education has established a new taskforce (consisting of leading industry stakeholders) that will consider how best to support first-year students in their transition to university life, thus benefitting their mental wellbeing.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Meanwhile, the OfS is funding a series of wellbeing initiatives from providers nationwide to ultimately drive change[[20]](#footnote-20) – for example:

* The University of Derby will contemplate how teaching and assessments could be designed to aid wellbeing;
* Newcastle University will be running courses on how to manage problems such as stress, anxiety and loneliness;
* Keele University will develop a more integrated approach by working with local authorities, police and the NHS.

Elsewhere, Northumbria examines patterns in grades, lecture attendance, the use of library resources and the frequency of logging into an online learning environment to flag possible wellbeing problems in its student body.

Alternatively, Huddersfield run an award-winning, two-week ‘Flying Start’ initiative for new students, consisting of both course-related and social activities. Its aim is to ‘stimulate academic interest, develop good study habits and provide opportunities for students to work and engage socially.’ Students on the programme can also meet alumni and contemplate their future career.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Moreover, the student mental health charity, Student Minds, is working alongside other stakeholders to create a university mental health charter. This will reward and praise those providers, which have shown best practice and prioritised mental health of students and staff.[[22]](#footnote-22)

However, Universities UK have previously published their own mental health framework (due to be updated in September) that encourages institutions to adopt an holistic approach. The framework is split into several strands, stressing the importance, *inter alia*, of providing training to staff, creating peer-support communities, incorporating wellbeing into staff evaluations, using student data proactively and campaigning against mental health stigma.[[23]](#footnote-23)

### Grade Inflation

According to the Office for Students, the percentage of full-time, home, first-time students receiving a first-class degree nationwide has risen by 13 ppts from 2010-11 to 29% in 2017-18 (similarly, by 12 ppts to 79% for firsts or 2:1 degrees).

The OfS has used statistical modelling to examine these enlargements, taking into account factors such as age, ethnicity, disability, subject and POLAR quintile, which could affect attainment. However, their analysis reveals that the augmentation in degree classification cannot be completely delineated by such variables.

Instead, congruous with a previous report written on behalf of the UK Standing Committee for Quality Assessment (UKSCQA)[[24]](#footnote-24), they discovered evidence of ‘unexplained’ increases – namely, 13.9 ppts of first-class degree attainments are unexplained (similarly, 13 ppts for firsts or 2:1s). Furthermore, for firsts, 71% of institutions demonstrated a statistically significant, unexplained increase, when compared with both their own level in 2010-11 and the sector overall. [[25]](#footnote-25)

The University of Northampton was one such institution. The line graph below shows how the actual proportion of firsts and good degrees among full-time, home, first-time students has gradually increased since 2010-11 – by eight ppts for the former and nine ppts the latter.

However, the unexplained increase in degree classification has also steadily swelled since 2010-11 – by nine ppts for firsts and ten ppts for good degrees. The figure for first-class degrees last year is only fractionally above the sector-wide figure. However, that is not the case regarding the first or 2:1 statistic – with 19 ppts unexplained, Northampton is now in the bottom quintile from the 148 providers studied across England.

When inspecting good degrees by faculty from the last three available years (data supplied by BIMI), we see that the awards in FAST have grown by five ppts since 2015-16, and are now clearly above the other faculties. Recently, there has also been a spike in FHS to reach its own three-year high.

For first-class degrees, it is FBL (rather than FAST) which has been on an upward trajectory throughout, with its proportion augmenting by seven ppts from 2015-16. Meanwhile, the ascent in the FHS statistic since 2016-17 is again prominent.

Of course, any increases in faculty awards are not necessarily attributable to grade inflation – other factors, such as improved learning and teaching, may have played a part. But nevertheless, these two graphs make for compelling viewing.

In an attempt to tackle grade inflation more widely, providers have agreed to work collectively, so that confidence in degree classifications for both students and employers is not traduced. Following a nationwide consultation led by the UKSCQA, a statement of intent has been produced, with action to be taken ahead of the next academic year. As a result, institutions should:

* Ensure that students are challenged by their assignments;
* Evaluate their process for determining degree classifications;
* Uphold and reinforce the system for external moderation;
* Scrutinise and publish data on student outcomes.[[26]](#footnote-26)

### Academic Misconduct

There has been a 33% increase in the number of referrals for academic misconduct at the University of Northampton when considering the last three years up to 2017-18.

For the most recent academic year, 92% involved mature students – a statistic that has risen by 28 ppts from 2016-17. Furthermore, 72% involved BAME students, despite this demographic only making up 47% of Northampton’s population.

When breaking the data down by faculty, it is apparent that the vast majority of cases have come from FBL – 59% in 2016-17 and 64% in 2017-18. Considering the ethnicity finding above, we have previously seen that this faculty has the highest proportion of BAME undergraduates at 73%.

One form of academic misconduct is the use of essay-writing services (or contract cheating). In the past, the Students’ Union conducted research of the student body to raise awareness of this and ascertain a sample proportion of those that had cheated. Moreover, the organisation participated in an International Day against Contract Cheating, giving students the chance to reflect on how the practice undermines the quality and integrity of a degree, together with undermining the sector.

In March this year, the Government challenged PayPal to halt transactions for essay-writing services from being completed, while Google and YouTube have removed adverts for such companies from their sites.[[27]](#footnote-27) Furthermore, Lord Storey, the education spokesman for the Liberal Democrats in the House of Lords, is attempting to ban essay-writing services. He has put down a private member’s bill, which would, if successful, “make it an offence to provide or advertise cheating services for higher education assessments” for financial gain.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Outside of legislation, there are options available to universities to combat the problem. One such proposition is the use of honour codes, which would require students to sign a pledge not to contract cheat. To date, the idea has been more popular in universities and colleges in the United States. For instance, the honour code for Harvard College is:

“Members of the Harvard College community commit themselves to producing academic work of integrity – that is, work that adheres to the scholarly and intellectual standards of accurate attribution of sources, appropriate collection and use of data, and transparent acknowledgement of the contribution of others to their ideas, discoveries, interpretations, and conclusions. Cheating on exams or problem sets, plagiarizing or misrepresenting the ideas or language of someone else as one’s own, falsifying data, or any other instance of academic dishonesty violates the standards of our community, as well as the standards of the wider world of learning and affairs.” [[29]](#footnote-29)

Their Code is protected by a special council, which consists of students and staff. Their role is to consider potential violations of the Code and review policies relating to academic integrity.

In addition, students are required to declare their knowledge of the Code at different times during the academic year – for example, when registering, before the start of an examination or if handing in a thesis or final project.

Alternatively, research by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) resulted in a series of recommendations to eliminate the practice:

Inform students and help them develop skills in academic writing and referencing sources;

Make staff aware of the issue and what they should do in a suspected case;

Take consideration of possible contract cheating in course design and assessments;

Detect potential cases using linguistic analysis tools (alongside plagiarism software);

Commit to upholding academic integrity in the provider’s mission statement.[[30]](#footnote-30)

***Unconditional Offers***

The latest UCAS data demonstrates that, unlike many, other institutions, the University of Northampton does not make conditional unconditional offers to prospective students (whereby an offer becomes unconditional, if the applicant makes the provider in question their first choice).

However, out of the largest 140 providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, there are only eight which make more than half of their offers unconditional to 18-year-old applicants – Northampton is among this number.[[31]](#footnote-31) Indeed, since 2016, the institution’s proportion of unconditional offers has rocketed by 49 ppts.

It should be stated that the University excludes courses that would not be suitable for making an unconditional offer (including FHS programmes such as Adult Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work). Meanwhile, the scheme is reviewed annually to examine variables such as predicted grades, progression outcomes and the effect of grade inflation.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Further, this also comes at a time when Northampton’s student numbers (according to the Higher Education Statistics Agency[[33]](#footnote-33) and the OfS[[34]](#footnote-34)) have fallen consistently and gradually since 2014-15 (now down by 13% since then).

The increased trend of applicants receiving unconditional offers nationwide[[35]](#footnote-35) has piqued the interest of the Office for Students. In their briefing on the matter, they expressed concern about statistical analysis conducted by UCAS, which revealed that there is a higher chance of an applicant not attaining their predicted grades by at least two grades if they have already accepted an unconditional offer.

Despite recognising that unconditional offers have value (insofar as providing confidence and reducing exam stress for the prospective student), the report suggests that enhanced competition between providers has led to this spike. Furthermore, using ‘pressure selling’ to promote unconditional offers is also decried, with the regulator threatening to act if consumer protection law has been allegedly breached.[[36]](#footnote-36)

In light of this, the OfS has been tasked to investigate whether admissions procedures should be changed, as mentioned above. However, in a separate development, Universities UK has now launched its own admissions review[[37]](#footnote-37), with one possibility being a move to post-qualification admissions (thus eliminating unconditional offers altogether). This is a proposal which is likely to meet resistance from many in the sector,[[38]](#footnote-38) but it would be introduced by a future Labour government.[[39]](#footnote-39) Universities UK is due to publish its recommendations in spring 2020.

### Access and Participation

Following a consultation on improving access and participation in higher education, the OfS announced four targets in December which it has set itself, namely to eradicate the gaps in:

* Entry rates between the most and least represented groups at higher-tariff institutions by 2038-39;
* Non-continuation rates between the most and least represented groups by 2030-31;
* Good degrees (first or 2:1) between white and black students by 2030-31;
* Good degrees between non-disabled and disabled students by 2024-25.[[40]](#footnote-40)

Continuation rates have been analysed above, so we now scrutinise the other targets from a Northampton perspective (again utilising the OfS’s access and participation dashboard).

***Entry Rates (Most and Least Represented Groups)***

When studying the difference in the top and bottom POLAR quintiles for full-time undergraduates, there is a conspicuous distinction, whereby the entry-rate gap is much smaller for Northampton than for English providers overall. Indeed, since 2015-16, the Northampton division has fallen by four ppts, while the sector figure has remained more constant.

However, while the sector entry rates for quintiles are uniform (i.e. highest proportion for quintile 5, through to lowest for quintile 1), access proportions for Northampton have been a little more unpredictable. In fact, the salient statistic is now the 15-ppt schism between quintiles 4 and 1 – but although one can argue that this should be narrowed, it is nevertheless still beneath the sector distinction between quintiles 5 and 1 (18 ppts).

***Good Degrees (White and BAME Students)***

At present, Northampton’s overall BAME attainment gap for full-time undergraduates is 17 ppts – a figure that is four ppts higher than the English sector. It should be noted that the differential at Northampton has dropped incrementally since 2015-16, but nevertheless, the gap in each of the last five years has been statistically significant (as it has been for the sector).

However, there is a slightly different picture painted when considering only black students – for here, the gap is higher for Northampton (20 ppts) and particularly the sector (whose most recent statistic is ten ppts above the BAME gap). To provide context, the Northampton differential for Asian students in 2017-18 was only 12 ppts. Nevertheless, it is reassuring that, for black students, the gap at Northampton has descended by five ppts since 2016-17 and is now below the sector statistic (even though, like the sector, it remains statistically significantly and has been so throughout).

By combining the figures for both full-time and part-time students, Northampton’s overall BAME attainment gap in 2017-18 rises to 20 ppts, and we can use this figure to compare across faculties. Marked with a line on the chart below, it is apparent that the differential for FHS is much lower than for the other faculties, while the FEH statistic is nine ppts above the Northampton gap. Moreover, in the latter case, the difference in good degrees between white and black or black British – African students was 33 ppts.[[41]](#footnote-41)

The latest DLHE data (supplied by BIMI) reveals that FEH also has a greater discrepancy across the faculties between white and black/black British graduates being in employment, six months after qualifying (but the gap to Asian or Asian British graduates is higher in FBL). Elsewhere, the FAST statistic regarding Asian or Asian British graduates is perhaps not as lofty as one might expect, given there was a 46-ppt variation in good degrees between white and Asian or Asian British – Indian students.

In an effort to reduce the BAME attainment gap across the sector, a joint report by the Universities UK and NUS[[42]](#footnote-42) recommended that:

* Senior leadership teams at universities should make this a priority, by making the issue a part of KPIs and the institution’s strategic plan, as well as offering training on unconscious bias. Furthermore, the report notes that many providers have signed up to Advance HE’s Race Equality Charter, which ‘aims to improve the representation, progression and success of minority ethnic staff and students within higher education’[[43]](#footnote-43);
* Opportunities should be provided for students to talk about the gap and reasons behind it;
* Inclusive and racially-diverse working environments should be established, such as conducting reviews of assessment and curriculum – indeed, Kingston University have developed a framework that ensures inclusivity runs throughout its academic experience;[[44]](#footnote-44)
* Data on the attainment gap should be collected and analysed – for instance, Kingston University have created a metric which measures, by course, how much of the attainment gap is unexplained[[45]](#footnote-45);
* Providers should collaborate to determine best practice (a task that will be assisted by a new evidence and impact exchange[[46]](#footnote-46)).

### Anonymous Marking

Amongst the suggestions posited by Universities UK and the NUS regarding the attainment gap, mention is made of evaluating the assessment process. To this end, last year’s Academic Review postulated the following recommendation:

“Anonymous marking to be implemented across the institution, where possible, to ensure minimised unconscious bias and discrimination.”

In response, a University-led task and finish group (also consisting of staff/elected officers from the Students’ Union) was established to investigate further, and specifically, to address two questions:

* Is there any evidence of unconscious bias and discrimination in respect of the marking processes at the University of Northampton?
* If so, is the introduction of anonymous marking the appropriate mechanism by which to address this?

The 2018 Academic Review recommendation came, in part, as a result of an attainment-gap survey conducted by the Students’ Union. The qualitative data produced revealed some alarming comments in relation to the matter at hand. However, it was felt by the task and finish group that additional research was required, which would focus on the University’s assessment and feedback process more broadly before considering unconscious bias/discrimination and anonymous marking.

Regrettably, the response rate for the second survey, which was run in April, was poor. Nevertheless, numerous, eye-catching comments to questions were made, as outlined below:

***Do you think the marking on your course is fair?***

“Some of the assessments are not conducted according to module specs and the feedback given doesn't always match with the marking criteria. Also, the feedback sometimes says something hasn't been done (i.e. use of lecture material) when it has been done. Also for certain modules, different lecturers have different views on the same thing, so you never know whether or not you should be doing something.”

“I have been told that language and syntax in essays should be 'dumbed down' and I have received criticism for using technical terms and language (in an assignment covering the technicalities of a legal system). In a similar assignment, class feedback criticised the lack of technical terms and use of simplistic language. I have felt it necessary to speak to tutors to ask in advance whether they find my writing too 'complex/simplistic' so I can adjust my assignments accordingly. There is a lack of consistency and coherence as a result.”

***In what ways have you received feedback on your work?***

“Short comment received with my grade, no longer than a couple of sentences.”

“Written and recorded. It’s never advice though. It’s just general comments such as ‘this is good’ or ‘this is bad’. Nothing to improve or how.”

“In lectures and having to actively ask lecturers as they don't always give feedback on Nile.”

***In your opinion, do you feel that your work has ever been subject to unconscious bias or discrimination?***

“In comparing work with other students, I have received a better grade than them, whilst fulfilling the same criteria. Lecturers could be giving better grades to students they like than those they don't.”

“I’ve gotten higher grades than my classmates despite virtually making the same stupid mistakes. I know the lecturer likes me as a person and as a writer, so the bias comes through.”

“All the students that came from the HND got a C with identical feedback. The BA students had better grades.”

***Do you think marking to learning outcomes could address any issues of unconscious bias or discrimination?***

“I think, if you’re marking solely to learning outcomes, it removes any unfair bias or discrimination, but for my subject, things such as the presentation or aesthetic[s] of reports or portfolios also has to be considered.”

“Staff training on racism, sexism and prejudice would do more to combat.”

“Having said that, in Humanities/Law etc., there is more scope for discussion and interpretation and therefore I think learning outcomes may have limitations in such circumstances.”

***Would you like the University to introduce anonymous marking (where appropriate)?***

“Yes, but across the board. There is no need for tutors to know the names of the people they are marking. They should focus on the academic aspect of the work.”

“Yes. Anonymous marking should be the rule, there are too many examples in education systems (both at school and college/university level) where bias may influence marker decisions.”

“Yes, because it reduces bias or favouritism if that is present; but also, no, because if that student has an issue that they have previously highlighted that may hinder them, the lecturer has no way of identifying them.”

***Usage at Other Institutions***

Following concerns raised at the task and finish group as to how a possible implementation of anonymous marking would affect Northampton’s assessment and feedback process, research was conducted to investigate its deployment at other providers. For this exercise, the universities considered were the University of Plymouth[[47]](#footnote-47), the University of Essex[[48]](#footnote-48), the University of Bath[[49]](#footnote-49), Oxford Brookes University[[50]](#footnote-50) and the University of the Arts London (UAL)[[51]](#footnote-51).

***Summative/Formative Assessments***

These universities use anonymous marking, where possible, for summative assessments. However, none of the providers advocated anonymous marking for formative assessments (where the priority is, according to Plymouth, on ‘personalised and rapid feed-forward and feedback’).

***Exemptions***

In their policies, the institutions often listed examples in which anonymous marking would not be applicable – typically, where there is direct contact between student and assessor. For example, Plymouth’s exemptions were:

* Observed assessments (including presentations and vivas);
* Laboratory or field work;
* Performance activities (such as dance and theatre);
* Other creative or practical activities (where a marker has supervised production of the work);
* Activities developed in shared workshops and studios;
* Placement or practice observations;
* Portfolios;
* Research dissertations and theses.

***Marking Anonymously***

When anonymous marking is in force, policies state that students should be reminded to use their student ID on their work, and not their name (else their work may not be marked).

In addition, Essex elucidates: “Anonymity should be maintained until the marks for the piece of work have been released to students. In cases where work is subject to second marking, double marking or moderation, anonymity should be maintained until all stages of the marking and moderation process have been completed.” Therefore, a mark cannot be amended once a student’s identity has been revealed. Moreover, once grades have been confirmed, Plymouth make clear in their policy that, at this point, individualised feedback can be given.

For Bath, departmental quality committees have responsibility for determining whether anonymous marking is appropriate for an assessment.

***Lifting Anonymity***

Cases given in policies when it may be appropriate to lift anonymity include:

Suspected academic misconduct;

The work raises concern that a student, or someone else, may be at risk of serious harm;

Extenuating circumstances.

Yet, as Oxford Brookes mention, such examples would not stymie anonymous marking being used for other students on a given assessment.

***Disabled Students***

UAL alludes to disabled students in its policy, whereby reasonable adjustments may preclude work being marked anonymously. They state: “These cases will be considered on an individual basis with guidance available from the Disability Service.”

***Not Marking Anonymously***

If a piece of work is not to be marked anonymously, policies note that this should be communicated to students in advance (for example, by tutors or in programme handbooks).

Furthermore, alternative systems should be utilised instead to ensure a fair assessment process (such as second or double marking).

UAL postulate that any concerns on work not being marked anonymously should be fed to student representatives.

### Good Degrees (Non-Disabled and Disabled Students)

Between 2015-16 and 2016-17, the gap between non-disabled and disabled undergraduates (full-time) at Northampton rose by four ppts. However, following a more vertiginous fall, the statistic now stands at one ppt; this is now below the sector figure (which has had a statistically-significant gap since 2013-14, unlike Northampton) by two ppts. In fact, when including part-time undergraduates in the calculation, the margin becomes -1 ppt (augmenting to -11 ppts in FEH).

The line graph below appraises the full-time situation at Northampton by disability type (where data is available and using reduced sample sizes). After ascending to ten ppts in 2016-17, the gap relative to students with cognitive or learning difficulties has now plummeted dramatically and is now in negative figures (i.e. more good degrees are being attained by this type than non-disabled students). Indeed, the margin for FEH (full-time and part-time) extends to -24 ppts (contributing, utilising DLHE data, to more learning-difficulty FEH students being in employment by a differential of 12 ppts).

Furthermore, the gap for those with a mental health condition has stabilised at zero. The discrepancy for both multiple impairments and sensory, medical or physical impairments is five ppts, with the latter classification having enlarged by 15 ppts since 2016-17. However, we should note that none of the gaps here are statistically significant.

The juxtaposition of all students (full-time and part-time) with another disability (excluding those with a mental health condition) and a learning difficulty across faculties regarding their outcomes six months after graduation should be mentioned due to the diverse nature. Indeed, while FAST and FBL had sizeable variations in favour of those with a different disability, the polar opposite was true in FEH and FHS.

### Augar Review

In May, Philip Augar published his panel’s report into post-18 education and funding. The review’s terms of reference were to contemplate four topics:

Choice: identifying how young people can make informed decisions after the age of 18;

Access: ensuring students from all backgrounds can succeed in post-18 education;

Skills provision: ensuring that post-18 education provides skills needed by employers;

Value for money: analysing the contribution made by students to the cost of studying.[[52]](#footnote-52)

Together with calling for an extension of repayments for student loans from 30 to 40 years and the reintroduction of maintenance grants for disadvantaged students (at least £3,000 per year), the panel’s recommendations for higher education included:

Reducing undergraduate tuition fees to £7,500 per year (introduced by 2021-22 and frozen until 2022-23, before increasing in line with inflation subsequently);

* Augmenting the teaching grant from Government to make up the difference in lost income;
* An alteration to the teaching grant for individual subjects, relative to a subject’s costs and its economic and social value.
* Increasing the teaching grant to those providers with a significant proportion of disadvantaged students;
* A Government intervention on recruiting students to programmes with below-par retention, employability and future earnings by 2022-23 (if the sector has not acted).[[53]](#footnote-53)

Following the report’s release, both the NUS[[54]](#footnote-54) and Universities UK[[55]](#footnote-55) stressed the importance of the Government topping up funding for teaching, given the proposed drop in tuition fees. Indeed, the former had previously launched an ‘Education on the Edge’ campaign to oppose purported leaks from the review, which suggested a potential variation in fees between arts/humanities and STEM courses.[[56]](#footnote-56) The initiative also received the backing of the Students’ Union[[57]](#footnote-57), but as it turned out, no mention of this proposal was made in the report.

Damian Hinds, the-then Secretary of State for Education, stated subsequently that the Government will ‘carefully consider’ the recommendations, but their approach will only be finalised by the time of the spending review at the end of 2019 (yet, subsequent news has shown that the spending review is now to be pushed back by a year[[58]](#footnote-58)). When questioned by parliamentarians, he was also unable to make a commitment on whether the Treasury would make up the funding shortfall for universities.[[59]](#footnote-59)

And furthermore, former Universities and Science Minister, Lord Willetts, declared the top-up plan to be ‘implausible’. This was a view shared by Jo Johnson, who has since returned to his previous post as Universities Minister. If extra money were to be found, he said: “It would not be a sustainable stream of funding that would enable universities to plan programmes [and] plan hiring across departments.”[[60]](#footnote-60)

Indeed, given Mr Johnson’s previous and continued opposition towards the Augar Review[[61]](#footnote-61), it is now unclear as to how many of the report’s recommendations will be enacted.

## Summary

As previously mentioned, the University has set itself a target for overall NSS satisfaction for 2019-20 of 90%. However, based on this year’s results, it seems highly unlikely that this will be attained.

Other than for student voice, all scales have satisfaction at three-year lows. The performance of learning resources is most troubling, caused by the figure for IT being the second-worst in the UK out of University providers. There was also little joy for organisation and management, with scores for the course being well-organised (Q15) and course changes being communicated effectively (Q17) significantly below OfS benchmarks.

Considering demographics, we have witnessed a remarkable contrast in satisfaction between international and EU students, while fair marking has been shown again to be a clear issue among BAME students.

At a faculty level, FBL produced scale scores repeatedly below those of the other faculties, and is under University thresholds for teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support. On the flipside, FHS came away as the most improved faculty.

It was pleasing to see nine programmes achieve maximum overall satisfaction. While respondents consistently praised academic staff for their support and passion, they were often scathing about assessment and feedback in their comments, with inconsistent marking, vague assignment briefs and feedback that could take far too long to receive. It was a similar story in organisation and management, caused by timetabling issues, room changes and a lack of communication. Problems with IT also came to the fore, as sample members censured the Wi-Fi, NELSON and required software. Moreover, the impact of the parking situation on commuter students was most worrying.

We also saw that continuation rates for all faculties except FEH were underneath the University’s threshold figure. On wellbeing, Northampton respondents to the Student Academic Experience Survey 2019 were found to be more anxious (by five ppts) than the UK sector. Moreover, to see Northampton in the bottom quintile amongst English institutions for ‘unexplained’ grade inflation was disappointing. Elsewhere, it was interesting to discover that Northampton is in the top eight providers in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for making unconditional offers – a policy that could be eliminated by a change to post-qualification admissions (as backed by the Labour Party).

Entry rates at Northampton between the most and least represented groups are very good, as is the award of good degrees between non-disabled and disabled students. However, the University’s BAME attainment gap for full-time undergraduates is still four ppts above the sector, while the gap is an especial problem in FEH. Together with findings for individual programmes and comments made in a Students’ Union survey on assessment and feedback, the request for anonymous marking is evidenced again.

1. The Office for Students’ benchmarks note the sector average percentage agree scores, but are adjusted to reflect the mix of students and subjects at each provider. The adjustment takes account of subject of study, age, sex, ethnicity, disability and mode of study. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Office for Students, “National Student Survey – NSS”. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-information-and-data/national-student-survey-nss/get-the-nss-data/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Data supplied by the University’s Business Intelligence and Management Information (BIMI) Unit. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Office for Students, “2019 NSS Benchmark Data”. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/fdff54ff-aef4-42a1-8664-3a62e18c55e2/nss_benchmarks19-050719.xlsx>. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Participation of local areas (POLAR) data measures the proportion of young people entering higher education in the UK, based on geographical areas. Each local area is split into five groups (quintiles), with quintile 1 revealing the lowest participation rate (and hence most disadvantaged areas) and quintile 5 the highest participation rate. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Data supplied by BIMI. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://nile.northampton.ac.uk/bbcswebdav/pid-4870094-dt-content-rid-4719874_1/xid-4719874_1>. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://nile.northampton.ac.uk/bbcswebdav/pid-4808253-dt-content-rid-4365644_1/xid-4365644_1>. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The most recent edition of the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey was published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) in July 2018, and relates to graduates who qualified in 2016-17. This survey is now being replaced by a new Graduate Outcomes survey, with the outcomes of 2017-18 graduates 15 months after qualifying (increased from six months) being released in spring 2020. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Anna McKie, “Long commutes make students more likely to drop out”, Times Higher Education, August 2019. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/long-commutes-make-students-more-likely-drop-out>. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Damian Hinds MP (then Secretary of State for Education), Letter to Sir Michael Barber (Chair of the Office for Students), February 2019. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/8c8219d4-b565-4310-ad80-84f3872e628f/ofs-strategic-guidance-2019.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Damian Hinds MP (then Secretary of State for Education), Letter to Sir Michael Barber (Chair of the Office for Students), June 2019. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/62570c00-ffeb-4e4c-ac7b-6c620a1ad679/damian-hinds-ofs-supplementary-guidance.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <https://nile.northampton.ac.uk/bbcswebdav/pid-4808253-dt-content-rid-4482824_1/xid-4482824_1>. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/access-and-participation-data-dashboard/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The Insight Network and Dig-In, “University Student Mental Health Survey 2018”, March 2019. <https://assets.website-files.com/561110743bc7e45e78292140/5c7d4b5d314d163fecdc3706_Mental%20Health%20Report%202018.pdf>. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
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22. <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/charter.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Universities UK #stepchange framework, <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/stepchange/Pages/default.aspx>. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
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