

UCS HE STUDENT EXPERIENCE POLICY

Relevant to all students studying at University Centre Somerset, irrespective of validating partner or awarding body and delivery mode.

Students studying on a programme validated by The Open University, University of Plymouth, University of the West of England Bristol, Pearson, CPCAB, and others should also refer to that institution's (where available) Student Experience Policy regards additional opportunities available.

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Approved by: SLT
Date: August 2026
Review date: July 2029

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Introduction

- 1.1 University Centre Somerset (UCS) is the higher education arm of UCS College Group. The aim of this document is to describe, and provide, details of the UCS's engagement with its higher education students. Providing an overview of the overall student experience for those studying a full-time or part-time course with UCS.

Policy Statement

- 2.1 This policy has been developed in consultation with students (via student representatives) and UCS College Group staff.
- 2.2 This policy provides a commitment from UCS, to our students, regards the delivery of opportunities and experiences that sit outside of the classroom and learning environment to provide a more dynamic and fuller student experience.
- 2.3 Regulation of the higher education sector, in England, is provided by the Office for Students (OfS) (Office for Students), in partnership with registered higher education providers. In addition, ensuring that students receive the advertised experience and product being sold by an institution, is the UK Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) (Competition and Markets Authority). Providing protection to the consumer, students, and ensuring that products are delivered 'as advertised', or that actions are taken to ensure students are informed of changes and amendments to a provision.

Scope

- 3.1 This information is relevant to all students and staff (academic and support) involved in the delivery or support of higher education programmes within UCS.
- 3.2 This policy applies to all programmes of study at level 4 or above, including those that are validated externally with university partners, receive funding from the OfS or are professional qualifications that are funded by other streams.
- 3.3 The contents of this policy apply to all modes of delivery, whether full-time or part-time, and all UCS enrolled students as it details the student experience journey and this may differ (practically) from provision to provision, but the overall experience remains valid.
- 3.4 Although this policy details student experience within UCS, students completing programmes through validated partnerships (for example, with University of the West of England Bristol (UWE) and University of Plymouth (UoP) may also have access to student experiences and opportunities provided by that institution. For further information on these, students should refer to that institutions policies.

Defining the Student Experience

- 4.1 UCS defines the student experience as 'the journey which an individual student progresses through whilst engaged with any stage of 'being a student''. This includes, but is not limited to, the application and admissions process, induction and onboarding, teaching learning and assessment, student support, pastoral and social experiences, as well as graduation and alumni.
- 4.2 UCS's commitment to the student experience remains the same and does not differ based upon whether a student is full-time or part-time, self-funded or sponsored, or a

higher achiever or not. All students have the right to a safe, positive, engaging, and rewarding experience whilst studying with UCS.

- 4.3 All UCS activities, opportunities, and student experiences are underpinned by our primary commitment to provide all our students with a safe and supportive learning environment. See Section 7 for details.

Purpose, Sector Standards, and Guidance

- 5.1 The purposes of Student Experience mechanisms are multiple for UCS. These include
- Enhance the broader student experience within UCS.
 - Gather student feedback and commentary on their, individual and group, experiences whilst applying for and studying on a UCS programme.
 - Support students with their journey and progression through a UCS programme.
 - Provide opportunities for both in, and out of, campus experiences to support the UCS student community
 - Ensure students are supported, where suitable, through their studies and wider UCS experience.
- 5.2 The overarching principles of Student Experience mechanisms at UCS, describes the values and characteristics expected as a result of this policy:
- All students are treated fairly and equitably, and with justice and respect.
 - All students can actively engage with, and contribute to, the enhancement of their experience of being a higher education student at UCS.
 - Student Representatives are trained and supported to enable them to successfully fulfil their role.
 - Student Representatives contribute to the development and continuous improvement of this policy and associated procedures and processes within UCS.
- 5.3 The Core Practice published by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the advice and guidance related to Student Experience states: 'The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience' The Common Practice states 'The provider engages students individually and collectively in the development, assurance and enhancement of the quality of their educational experience' This policy has been written to reflect the Expectations, Core and Common Practices stated in the UK Quality Code, published by the QAA¹.
- 5.4 The decision to engage with the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) gives students an indication of the quality of teaching, learning and student outcomes at UCS. The TEF has a focus on Teaching Quality, Learning Environment and Student Outcomes and Learning Gain. It uses student opinion as expressed through the National Student Survey (NSS) and data provided by former students through the Graduate Outcomes survey (completed 15 months after completion of the course).

Related Policies

- 6.1 This policy should be read with reference to:
- Partner university Student Union information
 - UCS College Group's Equality Diversity and Inclusion Policy

¹ <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/quality-code/advice-and-guidance/student-engagement>

- UCS HE Complaints Policy
- UCS College Group's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Procedure
- Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)

Providing a Safe and Supportive Learning Environment

7.1 At the core of everything UCS, and the wider UCS College Group, does is our commitment to providing our student communities with a safe and supportive learning environment. We know that students who are supported and feel safe whilst studying are more likely to get better results and achievement, setting them up for a better start in their careers². UCS College Group's strategy for providing a safe and supportive environment for our students is a common thread throughout all aspects and elements of the institution but can be most visibly seen in four areas.

7.2 *Safeguarding*

Safeguarding is a primary consideration within the whole of the UCS College Group, and forms the basis for all considerations, actions, decisions, and planning across the group. Although Safeguarding may be considered as a primarily Further Education consideration, it does underline Higher Education also.

The UCS College Group Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Procedure is available on the UCS College Group website ([Policies and Reporting | UCS College Group](#)), and explains in detail the commitment of UCS towards this.

7.3 *Sexual Misconduct and Harassment*

UCS College Group has a zero tolerance towards sexual misconduct and harassment and as defined by the Office for Students, we have a duty to protect students "from harassment and sexual misconduct from other students, staff, and visitors"³. Full details of UCS' approach to Sexual Misconduct and Harassment is available within our UCS HE Sexual Harassment Policy, available on the UCS website ([UCS Policies and Regulations](#)).

7.4 *Freedom of Speech*

The Office for Students (OfS), Department for Education (DfE), and others support that "Freedom of speech is fundamental to our society... Within this, universities have a special place as centres of enquiry and intellectual debate, where new ideas can emerge and challenge established thinking."⁴ UCS is committed to ensuring all our students, staff, guest speakers, and visitors are able to exercise their freedom of speech within the law, and how we ensure this is available within our UCS HE Freedom of Speech policy on our UCS website ([UCS Policies and Regulations](#)).

7.5 *Extenuating Circumstances (ECs) and Long-Term Health Conditions (LTHCs)*

Staff at UCS recognise that life does not always run smoothly, and the challenges that can face students during their time on a course can be varied and have mixed impacts. To support students when challenges do happen, UCS holds processes around

² "UK analysis of the Student Academic Experience Survey shows that student wellbeing is closely associated with engagement, continuation, and academic success, particularly for students facing disadvantage." Sanders, M. (2023). *Student wellbeing over time: analysing Student Academic Experience Survey data*. Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO).

³ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/consultation-on-harassment-and-sexual-misconduct/>

⁴ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/602a91ca8fa8f5037f5d8489/Higher_education_free_speech_and_academic_freedom__web_version_.pdf

Extenuating Circumstances for events that impact assessment, and Long-Term Health Condition information for the longer-term impacts on teaching, learning, and assessment. Information around these policies is available on the UCS website ([UCS Policies and Regulations](#)).

7.5 Career Support (UCS Elevate)

Studying with UCS could be the start of a student's working life, or a change in career. In both circumstances, UCS offers support for career growth and development, underpinning our commitment to "Degrees for Real Life" through UCS Elevate. This is a framework underpinning our approach to the design, delivery, assessment, and outcomes for students which helps them prepare and develop skill sets and abilities for use in the working world. Information around what this covers is available on the UCS website ([UCS Elevate](#)). Students at each Campus are able to meet with a Careers advisor or arrange an appointment via careers@ucscollegegroup.ac.uk.

Roles and Responsibilities

- 8.1 Within the provision of student experience at UCS, there are multiple stakeholders which inform, input into, and impact the broad experience for students. Each has group, and individual, roles to play within the oversight and management of the student experience.

8.2 UCS College Group

8.2.1 Local College Boards and UCS College Group Governors

Governing Boards sit at two levels within UCS College Group and its individual Colleges. The Full Board of Governors sits at the top of UCS College Group and provides governance and oversight of the entire provision. Ensuring compliance, quality and standards, business management, growth and development, and more. Ensuring that the institution remains in a healthy state and continues to work for its students, the local communities, businesses, and its staff.

Within each College (Bridgwater, Cannington, Strode, and Taunton) sits 'Local College Boards'. These provide a 'feed-down' from UCS College Group governance, and feed-up from individual colleges. The Local College Boards focus on the governance and oversight of individual colleges and communities; ensuring the individual colleges remain in a healthy state and continue to work for students, the local communities, businesses, and staff.

8.2.2 Senior Leaders and Principals

Senior Leaders are responsible for the programmes of study within their area or for the services that support them and for ensuring that the expected student experience is offered throughout the department, area, and college.

8.2.3 Assistant Principals and Deputy Heads of Department

Assistant Principals and Deputy Heads of Departments provide a curriculum-based lead for each Department of UCS activity based on subject disciplines. With regard to HE student representation they are responsible for ensuring staff and students within their department actively engage with the HE Student Experience policy and activities during the year. They are responsible for listening to and acting on, or responding to, student feedback as appropriate.

8.2.4 Students' Union

The Students' Union (SU) drives student experience and engagement within UCS from the grass roots. The Student Experience Team support the HE learner voice through Union meetings, the HE Student Congress, Student Voice Meetings, surveys and through ad hoc focus groups as needed. Student Unions from UCS's university partners

own Students' Unions are available for those registered with a partner awarded programme. Although this varies from partner to partner, the expectation from UCS is that university partners will deliver the support and experience as stated within partnership agreements and equally we will support our university partners in any reciprocal engagement activities.

8.2.5 *Teaching and Business Support Service Managers (including Student Experience & Safeguarding)*

Support service managers with roles in varying services across the college are responsible for having awareness of topics, activities and issues that affect HE students and to understand the wider context in which they reside. They are responsible for carrying out actions to respond to the student voice as designated to and agreed with them.

8.3 University Centre Somerset

UCS is responsible for ensuring there are clear procedures and opportunities available to enable HE students to engage with and inform the enhancement of their experience. UCS is obliged to do this as stated within its university partnership agreements. As a higher education provider, UCS works to the OfS Regulatory Framework, including the UK Quality Code published by the QAA as a key reference point for the quality management and enhancement of its higher education provision which is reviewed periodically by external agencies. It is also subject to OFSTED in relation to the employer-based activities in relation to Degree and Higher Apprenticeships (level 4 and above).

8.3.1 *Senate*

The Senate oversees Higher Education at UCS as the senior academic authority for HE and ensures there are systems and structures in place that are fit for purpose for student experience. The Senate monitors the impact of policies relating to HE.

8.3.2 *Central HE Team*

The central HE Team has a remit to assist with the development of policies and liaison with university partners, external bodies and stakeholders in HE.

The HE Team will work with the Student Experience Team to ensure this policy and procedure is updated regularly, is complied with and understood by those using it. The HE Team will work with the SU to carry out focus groups enabling evaluation of and student input into interventions related to the student experience and the Access and Participation Plan.

8.3.3 *Admissions*

The admissions team support UCS colleagues and potential students with the application process and ensuring that our approach to student recruitment is fair, equity driven, and supportive for all. At the very start of a students' journey (applying for a course) this team processes and oversees UCAS and direct applications from both external and internal students.

The admissions team also oversee UCS' Access and Participation Plan which provides details on how UCS is committed to, and working on, providing access to Higher Education for the diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds within Somerset.

8.3.4 *Quality*

The UCS HE Quality Team provides support to students and staff to ensure that the quality of the course being delivered is as expected by our students and our awarding organisations and partners. Through a course students will experience welcome and

induction, assessment verification and moderation, feedback and feedforward on assessment, student voice and experience feedback opportunities, and more. All of which are designed to underpin the oversight and governance of our courses and provision. Students can learn more about these processes from the UCS HE Quality Team or their lecturers and course leader.

8.3.5 UCS (HE) Student Experience (inc. Student Experience Officer)

The Student Experience & Safeguarding Teams at each Campus are responsible for leading the student voice strategy for all students of the College, including HE students at UCS, and for monitoring progress against the achievement of the strategy. This team works within the UCS HE Quality Team to provide enriching and engaging experiences and opportunities for students, but also to ensure the student voice is heard and responded.

8.3.6 Course Leaders

Course Leaders manage individual programmes of study. They may have different areas of responsibility based on partnership arrangements with universities, but these responsibilities will be broadly similar. Key areas of responsibility will include the scheduling of and attendance at programme meetings for programme staff and student representatives. They will be responsible for ensuring that the student voice is listened to at course level, recorded and formally responded to. They are responsible for encouraging students on their programme to actively engage with student representation activities in accordance with the policies and processes particular to their university partner or the college as applicable.

8.3.7 Lecturers

Working directly with applicants, students, and alumni within and around a UCS course, lecturers provide the day-to-day delivery, assessment, and management of the course and its modules. Working with the Module and Course Leaders, as well as the UCS HE Quality Team, Student Experience Team, and others, they support students as they work towards achieving the qualification they are enrolled on to and through to graduation and the start of their career.

8.3.8 Student Representatives

Elected by their student group, a Student Representative acts as the voice for the group and supports both students, lecturers and course leaders, and the UCS HE Quality Team to provide feedback, consultation, and assistance with an individual student group. Student Representatives are important within the wider student voice and play a vital role in the quality and oversight of a course.

8.3.9 Students

Higher Education students are responsible for actively participating in the representative process by electing representatives and providing feedback in line with the procedures described within this policy and/or that of their affiliated partner university.

Student Experience Activities

- 9.1 Within UCS there are a wide range of activities and opportunities provided to students. Each happens on a cyclical basis, and is intended to either gather feedback from students, enhance the student experience, provide oversight and governance to the student journey and wider education provision
- 9.2 The overall provision of student experience is provided irrespective of delivery mode or course (see paragraphs 3.1 to 3.3), although it is recognised that not all opportunities identified below will be suitable, or of interest, to all students. Especially those on block

release, employer-sponsored programmes, etc. As such, these will continue to be offered but student experience may be limited.

Student Feedback	Student Experience	Oversight and Governance
Pre-Course Support & Communications		UCS and Local Governors
Student Voice Meetings	Admissions and Induction	Senate
Student Tutorials and 1:1s		Attendance Expectations
Congress	UCS Freshers' Fair	Annual Programme Monitoring
Student Surveys (NSS and SPQ)	Activities & Socials	Award Boards
Tell us More	HE Common Rooms	Subject Assessment Panels
You Said, We Did	HE Work Rooms	Partnership Reviews
Meet the Dean Sessions	HEADstart	Academic Misconduct Panels
End of Module Student Feedback		
Programme External Examiners	Student Support Services	Programme External Examiners
UCS Student Engagement Officer		EC Panels
UCS Student Central & Alumni		Appeals and Complaints
Central HE Team		
Student Representatives & Student Ambassadors		
Students' Union		

Student Voice

10.1 Within the quality cycle used at UCS, the gathering of Student Voice and student feedback plays a key role in informing us all around the experience which students receive and undergo as they study with us. The approach we take to Student Voice includes various opportunities to gather student feedback throughout the academic year.

Opportunity	Window	Opportunity	Window
UCS Induction Survey	October	Student Voice Meetings (Non-UoP Courses)	November and March
Programme Committee Meetings (UoP Courses)	November and March	Tell Us More	All Year
End of Module Student Feedback	On Completion of a Module	UCS Congress	November
National Student Survey (NSS)	January - April	Student Perception Questionnaire (SPQ)	February - April
You Said, We Did	All Year	Appeals and Complaints	All Year
Safeguarding Report	All Year	External Examiners	Spring/ Summer Term
Senate	October, March, and May		

10.2 Throughout the academic year the above opportunities are held as a range of formal and informal ways for students to provide feedback on their experiences on a UCS course. The informal routes, including: UCS Induction Survey, and Tell us More are gathered and responded to by the appropriate individual (i.e. UCS HE Central Team, Course Leader, etc) from within UCS.

10.3 The formal feedback channels, including: Student Voice Meetings (Non-University of Plymouth courses); Programme Committee Meetings (University of Plymouth Courses); National Student Survey (NSS); and Student Perception Questionnaire (SPQ) are conducted at set times within the year and act as a point in time snapshot' of the UCS student experience.

10.4 National Student Survey (NSS) is organised by the Office for Students, with set data gathering techniques and technologies, and the outcome data is shared nationally via the NSS Data Dashboard on the Office for Students Website ([National Student Survey data: provider-level dashboard - Office for Students](#)). The Student Perception Questionnaire (SPQ) is an internal facsimile of the NSS and is organised by the UCS HE Quality Team. The results of this are published within UCS and UCS College Group, and also shared with relevant HE partners.

10.5 The Appeals and Complaints procedure is available for use throughout the year and follows a process that sits within the UCS College Group. Details of the Appeals and Complaints procedure can be found on the UCS Website ([UCS Policies and Regulations](#)).

10.6 When gathering student feedback, UCS generates actions in response. These actions are 'owned' by an individual or team within either UCS or the wider UCS College Group (i.e. Catering or IT Support) and these are tracked for response and completion. Upon completion, the outcome and result is shared with students through the 'You Said, We Did' feature of our student community platform.

- 10.7 All of these activities and opportunities are supported by Student Representatives that sit within each course group, and provide feedback guidance to the Course Leader and others (i.e. UCS HE Quality Team, etc) to support the UCS ability to respond to student feedback.

Student Representatives

- 11.1 Every programme year group is entitled to appoint a student representative, or two if this is preferable or more practical. Student representatives are appointed on an annual basis to represent their programme year group via a consensus from the group. The appointment process happens during the first term of the academic year or equivalent depending on the study pattern of the programme and is led by the Course Leader. The Course Leader is responsible for reporting the confirmed representative(s) to the Student Experience Team so that liaison activities can commence.
- 11.2 Student representatives will receive training, normally, during their first academic term in office. Training may be delivered by the College and/or by affiliated partner universities as relevant. The College's training programme is reviewed and updated following feedback from student reps the previous year. The College will work with guidance and information already available from the QAA, NUS and partner universities to support the development of its training offer.
- 11.3 The key focus of student representative training is for reps to canvas the opinion of their peers and to raise issues that are widely felt, strongly felt and achievable, as well as to report areas of good practice.

Review of This Policy

- 12.1 This policy is reviewed, for minor changes and updates, in the summer at the end of each academic year. This is to allow for any learning or developments identified within the preceding academic year to be implemented in to the policy.
- 12.2 Although it is intended that the policy is fully reviewed every three years for major changes and updates, where necessary the policy will be reviewed and updated within these times. This includes updates required by the Office for Students (OfS) and other governing organisations, as well as requests by Higher Education Partners.

Annex A

- A.1 The following are brief descriptions of the activities, events, and opportunities provided to UCS students within the academic year. The list is non-exhaustive and events can be removed or added as required, and although the below will be offered within an academic year, some events may not take place where student engagement is low.
- A.2 *UCS Induction and Freshers' Fair*
All new students, and returning students where appropriate, are expected to attend the UCS Induction and Freshers' Fair at the start of each academic year. This event provides students with key information about their journey with UCS, the services and opportunities available to them, and details on Safeguarding and other important topics. These events are organised by the UCS HE Central Team and provide a springboard for new students arriving at UCS.
- A.3 *Central HE Team*
Located on the Taunton Campus, but regularly travelling to all campuses within UCS, this team support curriculum and delivery teams with their provision. Ensuring that the delivery quality is at the correct standard and is compliant with the regulation of higher education in England. In addition, this team support students through processes such as application and admission, extenuating circumstances and reasonable adjustments, student voice and feedback, and award boards and outcomes.
- A.4 *HEADstart*
Provided by UCS library services, HEADstart (Higher Education Academic Development start) introduces students to the academic skills required for higher education. This includes a selection of sessions that are delivered to individuals and groups of students and are usually organised by your course leader as part of your course introduction.
- A.5 *Attendance Expectations*
All UCS students are expected, as detailed within the Terms and Conditions of enrolment (available at [UCS Policies and Regulations](#)), are expected to attend all timetabled classes. Where an absence is unavoidable students must communicate with their lecturer or course leader. Failure to maintain attendance could result in maintenance loans or grants being withheld, UCS informing the Student Loan Company of poor attendance, or a student being withdrawn from a course.
- A.6 *Student Tutorials and 1:1s*
The monitoring of support of student experience and progress within a course is conducted not only through feedback and discussions between a lecturer or course leader and the group, but also through 1:1s and tutorials. Where offered, it is expected that students will engage in these to support their own progression and development whilst working towards completion of a module, year of study, or qualification.
- A.7 *UCS Student Central & Alumni*
UCS provides a central communications and community platform, UCS Student Central, that brings together students from all campuses and allows the sharing of information, news, and updates directly to the study body from the UCS HE Central Team. Students may wish not to take an active part within the platform, but are expected to regularly check for updates and communications.
- A.9 *Activities & Socials*
The UCS College Group and UCS student engagement teams regularly provide opportunities for students to engage with the student community outside of course time.

These events often include socials, sport, or interest groups and full details of these is available through the Student Engagement Officers.



A.10 Students' Union

Students may decide not to engage with the Students' Union, but it is provided by UCS College Group and supports students through the duration of a course. For more information, speak to your course team or the Students' Union team on each campus.

A.11 Student Representatives

Each UCS course and group will elect a Student Representative to act on their behalf to communicate feedback and comments from the student group to the course team and the UCS HE Central Team. Year 1 Student Representatives are elected in the September of the academic year, with returning representatives being elected in the May for the coming academic year. Student Representatives play a vital role in supporting the oversight and monitoring of courses and attend various events throughout the academic year.

A.12 Student Voice Meetings

Held twice a year, in Autumn and Spring, Student Voice Meetings allow for formal feedback to be gathered from the student group (via the Student Representative) and for this to be shared with both the course team and the UCS HE Central Team. More information about these is shared at the start of each Student Voice Window in November and March each year.

A.13 Congress

Taking place once each year, Congress brings all Student Representatives together to support the student voice within UCS. During Congress the UCS HE Central Team will work with representatives to gather feedback, consult on the UCS experience and plans for development, as well as provide opportunities for representatives to provide feedback directly to UCS College Group service heads and teams. It is expected that Student Representatives attend this event to support the wider student experience.

A.7 Student Surveys

Each academic year contains a selection of Student Surveys (for example National Student Survey (NSS), Student Perception Questionnaire (SPQ), Induction Survey, and Module Feedback) which allow UCS College Group and others the opportunity to gather formal student feedback to support the monitoring and oversight of the student experience, teaching, learning, and assessment within UCS. It is expected that students complete these surveys to support these processes. Course teams support students to complete these surveys through time in lessons, etc.

A.10 You Said, We Did

At all points of student feedback, actions are created that lead to demonstrable outcomes. These outcomes are communicated to students through course teams, where relevant, and the 'You Said, We Did' feature of UCS Student Central. This allows students to see the impact and outcomes of the feedback they provide.

A.14 Programme External Examiners

During each academic year, the course leader and team work with an External Examiner⁵ (EE) to ensure the quality and standardisation of that programme across the

⁵ "External examiners perform an essential function in supporting this diversity of subjects, acting as constructively critical peers. For example, they support course teams to ensure that students are assessed fairly and transparently by offering independent advice and support on modes of assessment and learning outcomes." (https://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/external-examining-principles.pdf?sfvrsn=fe91a281_12)

higher education sector within England. At times, the EE will ask to speak to students to gather feedback about the course and their experience.

A.19 Safeguarding and Sexual Misconduct and Harassment Prevention

As a College-Based Higher Education (CBHE) provide, safeguarding and the protection of all is paramount to the UCS College Group environment. As higher education has students aged 18+ in an environment with under 18 year olds and vulnerable individuals, the awareness of this is key to all. As such, all students engage in training around safeguarding and Sexual Misconduct and Harassment prevention.