

APP – Solent Students' Union Student Submission 2024

Are you satisfied that your university or college has provided you with access to sufficient information and data to complete the student submission?

Solent Students' Union and Solent University have a data sharing agreement which allows Solent SU access to student data including ethnicity, nationality, and registered term-time residence. Solent SU uses the data to learn more about how Solent students engage with us as a Union and learn more about how we can support a diverse cohort of students during their time at Solent. The Union President of Solent SU has been consulted during the development of Solent University's Access and Participation Plan with our perspectives seriously considered throughout its development. With this in mind, the SU are satisfied that this student submission was completed with sufficient information.

Approach

Can you tell us briefly how this student submission was put together, for example your approach to gathering the views of different students.

This student submission was authored by the Union President of Solent SU 23/24 & the Union President of the SU 24/25 in consultation with staff. A variety of collected data was used to create this submission such as SU surveys from recent years, casework data, and anecdotal feedback from students. We also reflected on our Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) submission which noted the experience of underrepresented groups of students at Solent University. Solent University have also commissioned Student Partners to facilitate and lead focus groups with the wider student population as part of the development of this APP.

Evidence

Please list any evidence sources referred to in this submission:

- Student Life Survey 2022-23
- Teaching Excellent Framework (TEF) Student Submission 2022
- Student Focus Groups Feedback (facilitated and lead by Student Partners)
- Solent University internal Student Data
- Anecdotal feedback from Solent University students 2023-24

Commentary

To what extent do the student body think that:

Your university or college has identified and focused the plan on its greatest risks to equality of opportunity?

The risks to equality of opportunity identified by the Office for Students are relevant to Solent students, particularly in the current socio-economic climate in which we operate. Therefore, it is important that the student voice from different demographic groups identified in the APP are represented and the primary focus of any strategic intervention.

Solent University have identified eight risks to equality of opportunity for students in terms of accessing, succeeding in higher education (HE), and progression from university. The eight risks were identified through the Assessment of Performance using Office for Students dashboards and internal data.

The Students' Union alongside Solent students have also been heavily consulted to ensure that Solent's understanding of the size and scale of risks to equality of opportunity was influenced by how they affect students individually and collectively. Part of the consultation involved inviting the elected officers to become full members of Solent's Equality and Wellbeing Committee as well as the APP Steering Group which has provided us with further opportunities to collaborate with the University to identify and propose actions to mitigate and address any identified risks.

Solent has adequately identified what we at the Union also believe to be the greatest risk to success (EEOR risks 1/2, OfS risks 3/4) for Solent students. We believe that when students struggle to present their understanding or proficiency of the subject or skills that are required for success, this may lead to feelings of self-doubt, low confidence, and aversion to exploratory or risk-based approaches to the subject matter. These aspects may impact on their ability to succeed at university, students with excellent skills might struggle to demonstrate their ability within their course which may cause low self-confidence leading to dropping out of university. We support the interventions included in Solent's APP as they are aimed at addressing risks to success.

We also believe that Solent has considered and recognised risks to continuation and progression from university (EEOR risks 4/5/6/7/12) for Solent students. We believe that insufficient support academically and personally can frustrate the continuation of underrepresented groups of students from year-on-year, and the progression from HE which could result in students choosing not to continue their time in academics and suspend their studies.

We believe that underrepresented groups of students face several unique risks to equal opportunities that aren't explicitly mentioned in the OfS EORR. Whilst we understand that OfS have chosen risks based on the Student Life Cycle from large pools of data, however from a student perspective, these additional risks play a significant role in the student experience which if not addressed could negatively affect the equality of opportunity during their time at Solent.

These risks have been known for a while and by addressing these risks, Solent can create a more supportive and equitable environment for all students. The Students' Union is uniquely placed to support students who are struggling, especially when it comes to instilling our students with social capital and a sense of belonging.

Do the intervention strategies outlined by your university or college seem a credible way to address these risks? For example, they are based on credible and relevant evidence and student insights.

In the Students' Unions opinion, the progressive intervention strategies outlined by the university have been designed to address the greatest risks to students' access, success, and progression.

The training for staff and students on diversity and inclusion, establishing support groups, and creating spaces where all students feel safe and valued are welcomed approaches from the university.

By addressing both academic and personal support needs, the university acknowledges the multifaceted nature of student success. Focusing on creating a sense of belonging and building social capital can significantly enhance the student experience, particularly for those from disadvantaged or minoritised backgrounds. By aiming to boost self-efficacy and academic confidence, the work that is going into these initiatives will empower students to take charge of their learning and future career paths.

We also strongly agree with the research the University has done regarding a culturally sensitive curriculum. Not only will this ensure that students are more engaged in their education, but it will raise awareness from students of all cultures, ensuring our home and international students have an enriching academic experience.

The mentoring scheme and the work with the GRIT programme is especially welcomed, and the Students' Union would be more than willing to support the facilitation. We are extremely aware that having a role model to guide students during their time at university allows them to learn things that students from more advantaged backgrounds may have grown up with knowing – creating positive relationships between students who in alternative circumstances may have never communicated.

The SU recognises that Steps to Success has clear objectives to enhance progression outcomes for ABMO and disadvantaged students, addressing both identified and additional risks. With a comprehensive evaluation plan that includes quantitative analysis, surveys, and continuous improvement based on KPIs, the strategies are well-supported.

Given the increasing importance of employability and labour market success for university graduates, the Living CV aligns with the broader goal of higher education institutions to prepare students effectively for their future careers. The lack of support in employment and earning exist for disadvantaged groups, and this intervention is designed to address the inequality.

According to the student feedback from the focus groups lead by the Student Partners, students have highlighted the effectiveness and areas for improvement in Solent's APP.

Students frequently expressed the supportive nature of lecturers and the University's effort in providing support, particularly in mental health and course adaptation. The campus facilities such as the library and Solent Gym have received positive feedback for their quality and accessibility.

In terms of career preparation, Solent is helping them prepare for getting in their chosen industry. Solent Careers provides employability support for students such as CV building sessions, and job interview preparations. The academic content has been deemed as "relevant and intellectually satisfying assignments".

Inclusivity and community on campus are both vital parts of the student experience. Students have expressed the good sense of community, and efforts such as the mentoring program and the Student Partners initiative were noted positively. Access Solent provides disability support services to students. Therapy and Mental Health team provides mental health support services to students. Both teams have been positively received and students expressed a move towards a more inclusive direction.

Your university or college's new plan represents a change in their approach?

Please explain your answer:

Solent's new plan takes a whole student lifecycle approach tracking ABMO and IMDQ12 students from pre-entry to graduation. We support this new holistic approach of supporting underrepresented students to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Solent's approach aims to increase the proportion of disadvantaged and AMBO students progressing to highly skilled/paid graduate employment and to improve progression outcomes for Solent FT first-degree students. The strategies mentioned have been created to mitigate risks outlined in the OfS EORR such as insufficient academic and personal support and unequal progression from HE. Additionally, they address self-efficacy and employability concerns, emphasizing the importance of preparing students for successful careers.

While we don't doubt that the university has been working on improving accessibility and participation, we recognize that the steps outlined in the APP are extremely visible and represent a trust in their students to support their plan.

Your university or college's access and participation plan is sufficiently ambitious in addressing the risks?

Solent University's APP seems to be sufficiently ambitious and well-structured to address identified risks. The plan's success will depend on effective implementation and ongoing evaluation to ensure that the targeted interventions are achieving their desired outcomes. Continuous student engagement and feedback will be crucial in adapting and refining the plan to meet the evolving needs of the student body, but the plan is very thorough and hits the problem from many sides.

Your university or college has engaged you effectively in the design of its access and participation plan?

Solent University decided to submit their Access and Participation Plan in the second wave to allow time to put together a thorough submission. The Students' Union President has been part of working groups and committees where the submission has gone through for comments.

The Students' Union was consulted at every stage of the development of the Access and Participation Plan (APP), incorporating student data insights from the last five years and reflections from the Union President regarding the credibility of the proposed interventions. We extend our gratitude for their proactive measures in ensuring the student voice was an integral part to this submission.

You have confidence that your university or college will involve the student body appropriately in the delivery and evaluation of the access and participation plan?

In recognition of the significant emphasis placed on student voice, and the substantial investment and actionable steps taken by the University, we are confident that the Access and Participation Plan (APP) will remain a top priority within the institution.

We commend the University's serious commitment to the APP and anticipate that the entire university community will rally in support of this initiative. Solent University is particularly well-positioned to attract first-generation higher education students who may lack adequate knowledge or information about accessing higher education, hence giving us all more responsibility to ensure these students are suitably accommodated.

To maximize support and achieve optimal outcomes for the initiatives outlined in the APP, the University can further enhance its collaboration with the Students' Union. By working closely together, both entities can develop additional support mechanisms and ensure the effective implementation of the APP. We welcome the inclusion of Student Partners as an integral part of the delivery and monitoring of the new interventions.

The Students' Union is confident in the University's commitment to listening to student voices. As mentioned above, we will strive to foster a closer partnership between the University and its students, identifying opportunities for policy improvement, cultural change, and strategic investment aimed at achieving the APP's objectives.

How do you think your student body will hold your university or college to account for the delivery of their plan?

By keeping the staff of the union informed of the university's plans they can ensure that as the annually elected sabbatical officers of Solent Students' Union come into their positions, they are made aware of the steps that the university have committed to in their Access and Participation plan.

They will have plenty of opportunities at joint meetings to ensure that the steps are delivered while also ensuring that the university are aware that they have the complete support of the union in the implementation of the APP and we will assist in any way possible.

Do you anticipate any negative outcomes will arise as a result of your university or college's new plan and any change in focus of their planned activities?

Although Solent's APP is comprehensive and well-intentioned, there are potential negative outcomes that could arise from its implementation.

Additionally, ensuring that the initiatives are sustainable for long term commitments as without long-term commitments, the students might not experience the positive impacts, or it might fade over time. Furthermore, APP must be monitored continuously and adapted accordingly as it might become ineffective resulting in failing to achieve their goals.

There is also a risk in the academic standards to meet participation targets which can be perceived as compromised. It is important to maintain high academic standards while supporting diverse student backgrounds.

Is there anything else the student body would like to add about access and participation at your university or college?

The high cost of tuition fees and the cost-of-living crisis remain a significant barrier for many students especially those who are first generation university students. While we at the SU understand that this is not fully under the university's control, we urge Solent to be outspoken with government bodies to ensure that students are being considered when it comes to policy change.

Many students face significant financial issues once they start university, which is why the SU run Food Exchange has become a vital part of many students' living situation, and we appreciate the support that has been received from the University and hope for the continued partnership in this important service.

It was noted that there feels to be a great divide between home students and international students in our last SU Student Life Survey, so the efforts that Solent University are putting into this are extremely welcome.

Student feedback received through our Student Life Survey has also highlighted barriers and areas for improvement. A recurring theme was the lack of personal and financial support. Students have expressed issues with placements, particularly for nursing students, and insufficient personal support were major concerns. We welcome the recent introduction of Personal Tutoring at the university and hope to see further improvements in this area.

Accessibility issues such as broken lifts and confusing directions when it comes to step free access were highlighted as well. Despite this, students did highlight the availability and quality of support for disabled students.

Students have highlighted unclear signposting for support services and resources. There were also requests for more recorded and captioned lectures. Accessing hardship funding has been found difficult due to the implementation of a new student records system which is needed due to the high cost-of-living crisis and noting the high food prices on campus.

Lack of student societies has also been highlighted in the student feedback which we are working towards improving as a union.

We are aware that the university has given themselves a significant task with their current APP, but we would be extremely grateful for the above considerations to be improved upon with our support.

What do you think worked well, and what suggestions for improvement do you have for the OfS regarding the student submission process, materials and support?

Solent SU feels OfS have provided clear guidelines for the student submission which helped us to understand what is expected and how to effectively communicate perspectives.

The provision of materials and resources for the submission are generally accessible which ensures that a wide range of students can participate.

There is an opportunity for enhanced communication and outreach between the union and the university. Increasing efforts to raise awareness about the submission process through targeted campaigns, leveraging social media, university platforms, and direct communications so that

students who may not be typically engaged in student politics or representation have a chance to be involved.