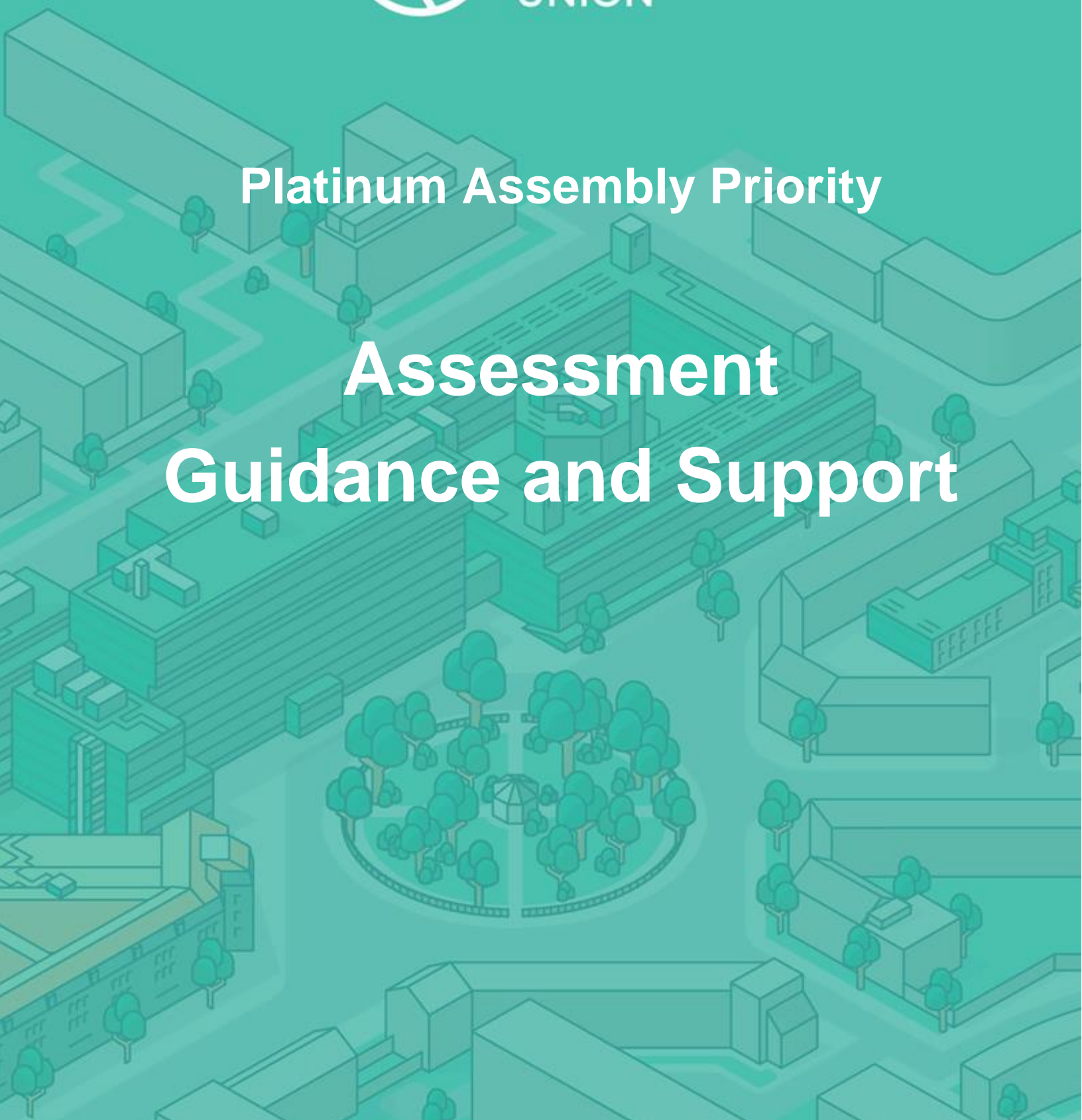




CITY
STUDENTS'
UNION

Platinum Assembly Priority

Assessment Guidance and Support



Foreword

As we navigate the ever-changing landscape of higher education, it is imperative for us as an institution to continuously reflect upon and enhance the educational experience we provide to our students. City, University of London should be committed to fostering an environment that promotes academic excellence, personal growth and the overall wellbeing of the students' community.

Assessment is a fundamental aspect of any educational journey serving as a crucial measure of any learning outcome and a means to evaluate students' progress. However, it is no secret that assessments can also generate anxiety, stress, and even hinder the learning process if not approached in a supportive and transparent manner. Recognising the significance of some of the concerns raised by students, City Students' Union has in the course of putting up this paper delve into exploring best practices and support systems aimed at revolutionizing the guidance and support that students get when undertaking assessments.

This paper sought to understand the challenges students face when it comes to assessments, the current support mechanism currently in place and the potential areas for improvement. By examining the experiences, perceptions and suggestions of our diverse students' body, we aim to develop evidence-based recommendation that enhance our assessment practice and ensure a fair and inclusive approach to evaluating students' achievements.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to every student who contributed to this research-piece sharing their insights concerns and aspirations. Your voices are essential in shaping the future of assessment at City University of London and your contributions would make a lasting impact on the educational experience of future generation of students.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to the dedicated policy assistants and other staff members whose commitment and passion drove this work. Your meticulous efforts in gathering and analyzing data will undoubtedly pave the way for positive change.

Finally, I encourage everyone within our academic community to engage with the findings of this research and actively contribute to the ongoing dialogue concerning assessment guidance and support. By working together, we can create an inclusive and supportive environment that fosters academic achievement, personal growth, and overall students' success.

Fortune Sampson, City Students' Union Deputy President

Introduction

The Platinum Priority, Assessment Guidance and Support for the academic year of 2022-2023, has been focused on the wide range of academic support that students potentially require such as Assessment and Grade-related criteria, necessary resources and support for assessment preparations such as past question papers and model answers, workshops on academic skills, seminars and more. The Union aimed to strengthen the support available to students to succeed academically.

Research was conducted to understand the availability of current support for students across the six schools at City. We spoke to Assembly members and Student Representatives, conducted surveys and focus groups. Additionally, we reviewed the program structure, assessments and tutorial hours available to students in their programmes. Further research for an overview of the academic support available in Russell Group universities in the UK was also conducted for a comparative study. For instance, we looked into King's College London, University College London, London School of Economics and a few more universities. We investigated data from national surveys such as the National Student Survey (NSS), Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES). This report is a representation of the research, engagement activities and compilation of objectives from the Assembly meeting.

Recommendations

- X
- X
- X
- X
- X
- X
- X
- X
- X
- X

Methods

The Union carried out desk research to observe the data provided from the National Student Survey (NSS), Your Voice 1 and 2 and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) of 2021-2022.

Followed by an initial survey was conducted on December 2022 until January 2023. This survey provided a further understanding of the type of assessments and support provided to students across six schools, as well as any additional support and guidance required for students to successfully complete their courses, including Tutorials and Academic Skills sessions. Quantitative data was collected on the engagement and usefulness of various academic resources, based on the student demographics from the six schools.

Finally, the Union conducted focus groups twice during the second term – once in February during the assembly Meeting and later on with Programme Reps in April.

National Student Surveys – Summary

Feedback highlighted a preference for have a standardised diverse assessment structure across all programmes in each of the six schools - a combination of coursework and examinations. This can lead to better evaluation of students' knowledge and skills in a fair manner.

- Bayes' students are overall satisfied with the progression of their courses. 78.2% students agreed about having fair assessments and marking in the 2022 national survey.
- Health and Psychological Sciences students found it difficult to progress with examinations alone. Only 48.2% agreed on fair assessment and marking.
- Science and Technology students have both coursework and examinations. However, due to the nature of their field where practical skills are required to succeed, students have suggested having online practical examinations, with the use of computers.

Deadlines clustered together were overwhelming for many students, which hindered their learning and progress. Students emphasised on the importance of assessment deadlines being more spaced out throughout the academic calendar.

Feedback highlighted a preference for assessment feedback across all programs to be provided in relation to each students' work individually against a set of specifications - aims and outcomes. The marking standard can be described against these specifications for clearer guidance.

- Students from Bayes school and a few Science and Technology programmes have expressed the usefulness of such feedback and how it helped them progress through their studies.
 - From the 2022 national survey, 60.1% students agreed on receiving sufficient guidance and advice on courses in Computer Science. Students from most other programmes reported receiving generic feedback for the full cohort which was difficult to relate to and improve their individual work.

- Only 38.4% of students studying Aerospace Engineering agreed on receiving helpful feedback on their assessments.
- Moreover, many students from all six schools mentioned significant delays in receiving feedback and they found one month's waiting time to be reasonable.

Regarding the duration of tutorials, students said this could be increased to 1.5 hours, as it would give students more time for practical exercises and receive feedback during, especially for practical skills required in Science and Technology, as well as preparation of assessments for all programmes.

- Currently, student engagement in tutorials is relatively low compared to lectures and this could be significantly improved by delivering interactive tutorials that directly support the preparation of assessments and skills in the field of study.
- Furthermore, access to tutorial recordings along with lecture recordings is required for students as essential lecture content and assessment related details are discussed during the tutorials.

Assessment Guidance could be improved in terms of writing, critical analysis, research and appropriate citation support. Especially for first year and international students who usually require further guidance to adapt to the new structure of curriculum and assessments.

Students believe **access to Turnitin reports** for project submissions will help them monitor their own work and avoid academic misconduct.

- They would also find it useful to have sessions regarding academic misconduct in relation to their Coursework.

Academic Skills sessions could be made more specific to course assessments, interactive and accessible for students from all schools.

- Such as programme related workshops on conducting research and accessing different databases.
- Further support for international students to adapt to the new educational environment would be useful as well.

Overall, students have expressed positive feedback on the lectures, the study resources and library support for academic purposes. However, there have been noticeable inconsistencies in Assessment and Grade-related Criteria specifications, and the release of timely, specific feedback for individual assessments. Students studying different programmes have different experiences regarding the above and so it is important to establish and follow a standardised approach to assessment and feedback delivery.

Findings from Survey

Students across six schools participated in the survey. However, the majority were from Bayes Business school and the school of Science and Technology. There was less engagement from students from other schools (see Appendix 1.)

Data showed the most useful assessment support resource is Past question papers along with Assessment criteria and Example Courseworks.

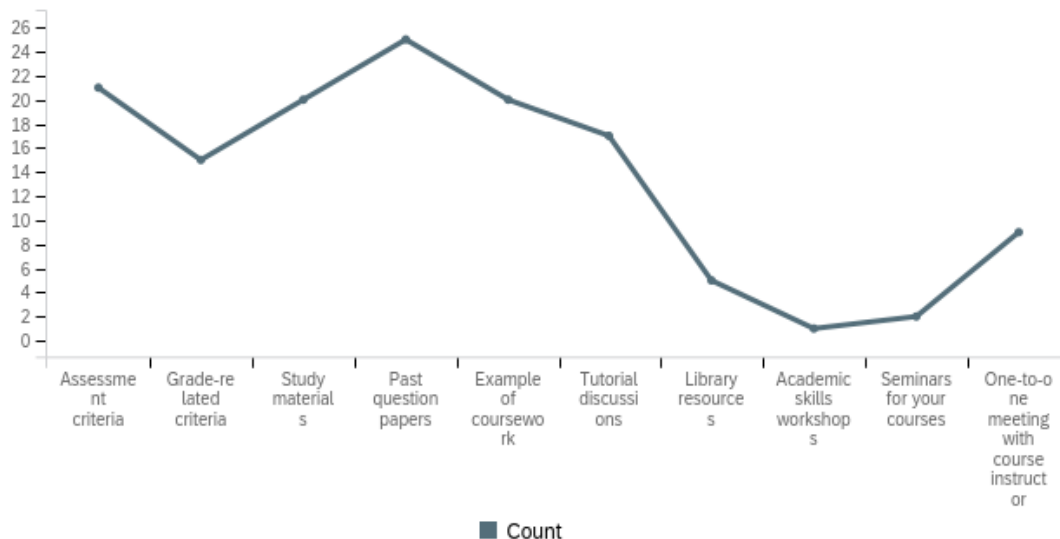


Figure 2: Level of engagement with Academic Resources.

Feedback from the survey also highlighted:

- Specific feedback for each students' work to help them understand their performance in relation to the Assessment criteria.
- Academic Skills sessions could be made more specific to course assessments. Interactive and accessible for students from all schools including international students. Such as workshops on conducting research and accessing different databases. More sessions to learn from Alumni experience at programme level.
- Need for more guidance and structure on answering essay-type questions.
- Revision guides and sessions for assessments.
- More comprehensive assessment criteria, and specification for learning aims and outcomes.
- Tutorial recordings are required as essential lecture content and assessment related details are also discussed during tutorials.

Findings from Focus Group Activities

School of Science and Technology

<i>Tutorials</i>	Tutorials should include activities such as solving questions with various difficulty levels for better practice and understanding of the learning material.
	Mathematics students mentioned that they are happy with how their tutorials are delivered. However, they would prefer in-person sessions rather than online.
	Engineering students believe that 1-hour tutorials are sufficient, but recordings should be available for students, as essential lecture and assessment details are covered during tutorials. The tutorial discussion should be consistent with the lecture content of the same week or day.
	However, Mechanical Engineering students mentioned that 1.5-hour tutorials would be more effective to learn the practical exercises during their lab sessions. And that more support is needed for these sessions as there are large groups of students (60) and would benefit from having Teaching Assistants go around the class to assist the lecturer.

<i>Assessment Delivery and Support</i>	Electrical and Mechanical Engineering students showed concerns about very frequent mistakes in exam questions that can lead to answers becoming invalid and not a proper use of valuable time during the exams. It is very important to proofread question papers.
	The mode of assessment delivery (online/in-person) should be set well in advance and students will benefit from support of resources they need for either electronic or hand-written assessments.
	The availability of past questions with worked out solutions for exam assessments would provide better support.
	Students should be given the option to take mock exams for courses that have exam assessments.

<i>Academic Skills Workshops</i>	Science and Technology students would benefit from practical workshops as part of academic skills. (E.g., Programming)
	Human-Computer Interaction students mentioned that Portfolio building and structuring would be useful for Design students. Sessions run by alumni are useful as well.

Furthermore, **Engineering** students showed concern for not receiving **assessment feedback** and this should be available for students.

Students in **Human-Computer Interaction** feel that their **coursework deadlines** and exams are scheduled too close together and each taking more than a month to complete. It would be helpful to spread out the deadlines.

Finally, **Mathematics** students mentioned that it would be advantageous to have internship options besides dissertation for their programme.

School of Policy and Global Affairs

<i>Assessment Structure, Guidance & Feedback</i>	Policy and Global Affairs students would also like to have the option to take mock exams
	For group coursework, students would like to be evaluated based on their individual contribution (when the module leader selects the groups for students).
	Students prefer individual detailed feedback on each of their assessments, rather than generic feedback for the full cohort.
	The ability to see Turnitin reports for individual submissions would help students monitor their own work and refine as necessary, as well as reduce cases of academic misconduct. It would also be useful to have a tutorial focused on Academic misconduct and the use of Turnitin.
	A set structure of the assessment as per the assessment criteria would be a more specific guidance for students.

<i>Tutorials</i>	For International Politics and Sociology, very few students attend the tutorials. This could be improved by making the tutorials more interactive such as discussion related to essay assessments and exams as they have limited guidance for their assessments.
------------------	--

School of Communication and Creativity

<i>Assessment Support, Guidance & Feedback</i>	Feedback given is very generalised. Students try to follow the general structure and guidance for the course overall, but it is unclear what will lead to achieving good marks. Feedback should be more specific.
	It would be useful to have access to more past papers and essays so that students have a clear idea of what to achieve.
	It would be helpful if students were encouraged to book drop-in sessions during office hours of lecturers. Especially for students with extenuating circumstances or international students.
<i>Tutorials</i>	Tutorials could be made more interactive where lecturers provide guidance on practical exercises and conduct brainstorming sessions for productive learning.
<i>Academic Skills Workshops</i>	Opportunities to attend sessions that provide guidance beyond the class tutorials. For example, workshops for 1 st and 2 nd years students to improve their academic skills by specifically aiming on areas to focus on.

School of Health and Psychological Sciences

<i>Tutorials</i>	For certain modules and seminars in Health and Psychological Sciences, 1.5h duration would be more productive.
	During tutorials there should be more interaction between lecturers and students.

<i>Assessment Delivery and Support</i>	Require support and time for a smoother transition between online and in-person exams and appropriate time adjustments.
	Students would benefit from access to Turnitin for viewing reports on their own submissions.

<i>Academic Skills Workshops</i>	Opportunity to participate in hands-on practical sessions.
	Postgraduate students require workshops on carrying out research, critical analysis and guidance on the use of open-source databases relevant for courses.
	Undergraduate students require more guidance and resources for expanding their knowledge and following relevant essay writing structures.

Furthermore, students raised that timely release of grades and feedback would be appreciated, as it takes more than a month on occasions.

Postgraduate students also highlighted they would benefit from more involved and active Programme Reps for better communication and impact on their courses. A few suggested one-to-one sessions with lecturers would be useful.

City Law School

<i>Assessment Structure & Guidance</i>	Improved support required for students who are not familiar with the structure of law assessments, such as first-year or international students.
	Overall assessment feedback given for the full cohort is very generalised, each student would benefit from more detailed feedback to understand the strengths and limitations of their work or essays.
	Onboarding practice for online exams when students were used to traditional in-person exams.

<i>Tutorials</i>	2-hour tutorials are most effective for Law students, specifically for assessment preparation. However, there should be more engagement during the tutorials.
	Tutorials should be recorded and made available to students in addition to the lectures.
	Tutorials for Law undergraduate, postgraduate and Bar Vocational Studies are preferred to be in-person. The sessions could be based on modules and individual skill levels, school specific.

<i>Academic Skills Workshops</i>	It would be useful for the Academic Skills webpage to include FAQs and give access to productive AI tools. More frequent communication from the team would ensure students are aware of the sessions being offered and improve engagement.
	Guidance on OSCOLA referencing for Law students and opportunity to ask specific questions during the session.

Bayes Business School

<i>Assessment Structure, Guidance & Feedback</i>	The assessments, apart from the exams, equip with skills needed for future workplace and it also depends on receiving individual feedback.
	Business with Marketing students mentioned that some of the coursework is not very related to the course content and a considerable amount of external research is needed to figure out what needs to be done. So, the assessment structure could be more aligned with the course learning objectives.
	The grade-related criteria could be set out in more detail, particularly about the level of critical analysis and the grade achievement.
<i>Dissertation Support (UG)</i>	Support could be improved for dissertation. The supervisors should interact more and provide guidance on the primary objectives and requirements for a successful dissertation that all students should be aware of.
	There should be a session relevant to dissertation including ethical requirements and academic misconduct guidance.
	One-to-one sessions with project supervisors to determine research questions and bi-weekly meetings.
<i>Tutorials</i>	Business with Marketing students mentioned that tutorials were mostly delivered during the 1 st and 2 nd years, and it should be prioritised to continue to deliver interactive tutorials for the 3 rd and 4 th years as well.
<i>Academic Skills Workshops</i>	A workshop on effectively using data analysis software such as SPSS. It is relevant to digital marketing and many companies also look for individuals with photoshop skills, using Adobe InDesign for instance.

Conclusion

The objective of the research and the Assembly deliveries over the past academic year have been to understand how the current academic support available to students worked out, to find out any major concerns that could be addressed both in the short term and the long term.

The likely impact of acting on the main recommendations was also considered to specifically improve the academic support around assessments and feedback to enable effective learning of students across all the six schools. Additionally, we investigated what could be standardised across all the programmes and if any specific adjustments could be made to programmes.

For instance, the delivery of tutorials for students in the school of Policy and Global Affairs to be more assessment-oriented discussions. For Science and Technology students the practice of computer applications during tutorials.

Assessment Support and Guidance continues to remain a priority in the upcoming academic year as voted by Assembly members. Further student engagement in focus groups and data collection through surveys would enable understanding of more specific areas to work on. As well as to acknowledge the academic support that continues to be successful.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Demographic of student participants in the survey from the 6 Schools.

