

City SU Student Submission OfS Response

Targets

1. What did your university or college tell you about its targets? Please provide a summary of your conversation.

Prior to the pandemic, many of the actual results against target were on, or ahead of, target and narrowing. This is positive as it highlights City was beginning to close equality gaps as laid out in its Access and Participation Plan (APP.) The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted many of the results particularly concerning continuation and attainment.

Access

In terms of access the target to reduce the gap in access between students from POLAR4 quintiles 1&2 and 5 was not achieved and instead increased by 1.5% to 32.1% in 2019/20. POLAR data makes this target challenging for City as well as other London Institutions.

Success - Continuation

The target to reduce the gap in continuation between disabled students and students with no known disability has been exceeded. The continuation gap between students with a disability and students with no known disability reduced from 9% in 2017/18 to 2% in 2018/19.

The target to reduce the gap in continuation between mature and young students was not met as it increased from 5% in 2017/18 to 7% in 2018/19. However, internal dashboards indicated that in 2019/20 the continuation rate reduced to 0.3%.

City's target to reduce the gap in continuation between care-leavers and all undergraduates was exceeded. The figure of 19.1% in 2018/19, already ahead of target, reduced to 9.8% in 2019/20.

Success - Attainment

The attainment gap between BAME and white students was ahead of target moving from 11% in 2018/19 to 6% in 2020/21. This is ahead of the 10% target for 2020/21. City explained that the reduction in the student attainment gap is linked to an overall increase in the awards of good grades rather than the impacts of the Student Attainment Project or representative of longer-term trends.

Progression

City has set a target to reduce the gap in progression to employment between BAME and White students to 3.5% by 2025. However, the APP graduate outcome data has not yet been published. City had identified that from City Graduate Outcome data there is a 5.1% gap between BAME and white students. The City Graduate Survey also highlights that 15.6% of BAME UK undergraduate 2020 graduates are not in graduate level employment or further study in comparison to 13% from the broader cohort.

There is no available data for IMD currently which means it is difficult to evidence the gap in progression to employment between IMD lower quintile and IMD quintile 5 students target.

2. Based on your conversation, did your university or college meet its targets? (yes/no)

No

3. Where your university or college has not met its targets, what were the reasons for this, and do you agree with the reasons given?

The access gap between students from POLAR4 quintiles 1&2 and 5 has increased to 32.1%, City describes that POLAR data is difficult for London intuitions. City understands that this is an area of challenge because of the vast inequalities of wealth in neighbourhoods in London. This makes it difficult for London Higher Education institutions and means fluctuations are likely. It is clearly difficulty using just POLAR data and thus fluctuations in the actual results against targets are likely to be expected for London institutions.

The continuation gap between mature students and young people increased from 5% in 2017//18 to 7% in 2018/19. This initial rise is concerning. However, City highlights that the internal continuation data indicates that the gap reduced to 0.3%. This is an impressive change, likely influenced by the mitigations put in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on graduate employment is described as impacting City's 2020 graduates and likely future graduates. This is used to explain the 2.6% gap in progression to further study or graduate level jobs between BAME UK undergraduates 2020 graduates in comparison to the wider cohort 6 months after graduation. Whilst the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been stark on the graduate job market, activity should put in place to ensure that existing inequalities regarding progression are not exacerbated.

4. What has your university or college already done to rectify this and what does it plan to do in the future to keep it on track?

To ensure that the targets remain on track City has connected strategic priorities for the Education and Student Committee to the APP. An example of this is the Employability Development Plan which addresses inequality gaps in terms of progression, as have been shown in the targets. Whilst committees of the university have oversight of City's APP and its targets, ensuring that ongoing continuous monitoring and evaluation takes places throughout the year can help to keep these targets on track. It is here there is opportunity for collaboration with the Union and increased student evaluation. (See **Working with Students**).

Activity has been put in place to tackle the progression equality gap between white students and BAME students. Many are listed below in the ways City has tackled the impacts of the pandemic. One area is 1-2-1 calls with careers advisors for at risk undergraduates to support their progression. These activities are reassuring to understand the activity City has put in place to support graduates. It is significant from talking to City students, particularly students from an LPN, the nervousness regarding the graduate job market. Students describe feeling unprepared and feel they have lost out on opportunities to gain skills that would equip them for professional life. Efforts should be made to deliver activity to ensure that students are confident to be able to progress post-graduation.

5. During your conversation, did you make any suggestions about what your university or college could do to achieve the targets that were not met? If so, what did you suggest?

The narrowing of the equality gaps at City across nearly all target areas is impressive and positive. There clearly is more work to be done to understand the causes of some of these, at times, dramatic narrowing's of gaps. This should be done to understand lessons learnt and to carry forward to ensure that the gaps continue to narrow or completely close.

The most significant aspect that needs to be understood is the impact of individual COVID-19 mitigations put in place on underrepresented groups of students. This involves breaking down individual measures such as online learning, Supporting Your Academic Success (SYAS), additional financial support and safety net policies. It is important to investigate the impact of individual measures and a combination of measures when taking forward lessons learned. For example, it is notable that SYAS forms were disproportionately submitted by disabled and BAME students. This analysis should be used to inform APP work, in particular the Student Attainment Project, going forward. Furthermore, it is significant to understand the impacts of mitigations that subsequently effect continuation as well as attainment.

The increase in the gap in access between students from POLAR4 quintiles 1&2 and 5, whilst understandably difficult for London institutions should be monitored to understand any trends that appear. When we spoke to students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods (LPN) few were aware of activities linked to accessing higher education. This should be investigated by evaluating the impact of Widening Participation (WP) activity when conducted primarily remotely in comparison to on campus.

Particular attention should be paid to the continuation gap target between **disabled students** and students with no known disability which reduced from 9% in 2017/2018 to 2% in 2018/19. It will be important to understand what cause the narrowing of the continuation gap prior to COVID-19 mitigations being put in place.

City Graduate Data, which highlights a 2.6% employment gap between BAME graduates and the rest of their cohort, is concerning. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy and graduate employment market are worrying for student employability. It is clear from conversations with City that work is underway to address this. It is important to emphasise the need to provide careers support for underrepresented students throughout their studies. During conversations with underrepresented students, employability was a particular concern, especially when discussing the impacts of COVID-19. There is the sense that opportunities to gain experience and 'soft skills' have been lost. Activity should take place to provide opportunities to catch up on the sense of lost opportunities to instil confidence in underrepresented students.

From conversations with City, work to understand the mitigations impact is underway, which is positive. For the attainment gaps, City plans to change its assessment strategy and review the lessons learnt from the mitigations put in place put in place. Student consultation will be important in order to measure whether the changes put in place because of lessons learnt will have the desired impact on access, success, and progression.

Activities

1. What did your university or college tell you about delivering the activities in its plan? Please provide a summary of your conversation.

Access

City has delivered various access activities as part of its WP Outreach work. Examples of this include primary and secondary tutoring, UniMentors programmes, taster weeks, Visit Days, and the Start@City transition programme. This is in addition to a schedule of online activity in response to COVID-19 which included a WP Outreach Blog, learning resources packs for schools as well as partnerships with schools to provide support directly to learners.

Success and progression

To support continuation, City has delivered numerous activities including new Student Engagement and Monitoring project (SEaM), personal tutoring, CityBuddies, CityCares as well as providing the usual professional services such as Mental Health Services, Disability Support and Academic Skills.

To support attainment, City established the Student Attainment Project and has begun to conduct other work around decolonising the curriculum. Data has also been published highlighting degree awarding gaps between different student cohorts. This has been used to inform the work of the Student Attainment Project in Schools.

To support progression, City has approved its Employability Development Plan. This was delayed in 19/20 but is now being delivered in 20/21. The plan focuses on addressing the Black vs White student progression gap. Activities include BAME alumni videos, targeting specific groups with interventions, mentoring relationships for BAME law undergraduates, targeted employer events run in collaboration with the Union under our banner 'CitySucceeds', BAME network of employers and support for 2020 graduates.

Funding

There are several bursaries and grants available to students prior to joining and during their time at City. These grants include the City Education Grant, CityCares and Sanctuary Scholarships. City described that students who received financial support had reported on how aspects of their student experience had improved as a result of funding. Students we spoke to in focus groups also spoke positively about the bursaries available at City. The Student Hardship Fund is also available to students to apply for in addition to the Digital Inclusion Fund.

2. Based on your conversation, did your university or college deliver the activities set out in its plan? (yes/no)

No

3. Where your university or college has not delivered its activities, what were the reasons for this, and do you agree with the reasons given?

The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed a proportion of the work detailed in City's APP. Where work has been delayed, in most places, funds or resources have been redirected to support students through the pandemic. For other activities, alternative modes of delivery have been put in place to ensure underrepresented students are supported through the COVID-19 pandemic.

The main delays, because of COVID-19, concern the evaluation framework for the APP. This is particularly significant regarding the student evaluation piece of the plan. Whilst the pandemic has understandably slowed work in this area, it is important to ensure that

evaluation, in particular student evaluation, remains a central aspect of City's APP work. It is positive to see that City is committing to revisiting its approach to student engagement in partnership with the Union across strategic work.

There have been delays to the decolonising the curriculum work, in particular with the pause of the School Action Plans. These aim to capture detailed information on planned actions in Schools and at a programme level. The Inclusive Curriculum Framework was developed for programmes to use to follow best practise for the academic year 20/21. It will be important going forward that City develops the School Action Plans to go beyond best practice and to address localised issues in the curriculum. Students should be involved in the process of identifying areas where Schools need to adjust their programmes. The students involved should also be included in monitoring the School Action Plans to help close the feedback loop. Students we spoke to had little knowledge of the activity taking place to address the Black vs White Student Attainment gap. There is communications work that should take place between City and the Union to scope how to communicate this activity to students.

In terms of progression, investment in the Employability Development Programme was delayed until November 2020. As a significant part of City's APP work on progression, it is a reassuring to see this activity is underway to be delivered in the next academic year.

4. What has your university or college already done to rectify this, and what does it plan to do in the future to keep it on track?

Where activity was paused due to the pandemic, City is clearly committed to restarting and ensuring work continues. This is notable on their projects related to progression where it will be vital to support 20/21 finalists. The other key aspect where City intends to deliver and expand on their plan is regarding research and evaluation. It is important for there to be regular monitoring and evaluation of the targets and activities set out in the APP throughout the academic year. This will allow lessons learnt from the pandemic mitigations to be incorporated into the planned activity; delivering and expanding evaluation work will also provide opportunities to research areas of issue raised by students, and to understand where interventions have been successful.

5. During your conversation, did you make any suggestions about what activities your university or college could deliver or improve in the future? If so, what did you suggest?

Personal Tutoring

From speaking to students, it is clear, once again, the significant role that personal tutoring plays in supporting City students. Students we spoke to particularly focused on the benefits of personal tutoring in terms of developing skills, fostering academic community, and providing employability skills. The impacts of changes to personal tutoring for 21/22 need to be monitored and evaluated to ensure the standard and quality is consistent across all Schools. The focus during personal tutoring should be on academic support, wellbeing support and fostering academic community.

Return to Campus

Delivery of activity, in collaboration with the Union, that builds students' social capital will be pivotal moving forward. Activity should focus on creating a sense of community particularly for BAME students' and Disabled students. There is space for collaboration in the Union's Student Communities Project to ensure the research supports the APP targets around retention and progression whilst building community.

Bursaries

The criteria for bursaries and funds should be reviewed. This follows feedback from some students we spoke to, particularly from LPN's, who had difficulty accessing funding. The criteria for bursaries available should not be exclusionary, or result in students being unable to access support. It is positive to see the introduction of bursaries, in particular the Hardship Fund and Digital Inclusion Fund to support students through COVID-19.

Support Model

City's review of their support model as part of the APP has been positive. However, from speaking to students there are elements where support or mitigations are being missed. Needs assessments of underrepresented students could take place prior to registration to understand areas where support may be required. This successfully takes place for some underrepresented students as part of CityCares. In future, this support could be expanded for mature students during registration. This would ensure support is signposted and mitigations put in place to allow mature students to balance study with other commitments.

Students we spoke to raised their difficulty accessing some support services such as the Mental Health Services. Activity should take place to investigate these concerns from students to understand whether it is a specific service issue or issues affecting a particular group of underrepresented students. Alongside this, the EDI Reps, a joint project between City and the Union, are conducting research to assess the cultural accessibility of City's Mental Health Service offering. It is important to note however that many students described positive experiences using both the Disability Support Services and accessing the Neurodiversity team.

Support for Students With a Disability

There needs to be better activity to work with Disabled students to understand their experiences at City. From speaking to students with a disability there was a distinct feeling of not being listened to, however their experiences could help inform new streams of work to support students with a disability. The process of disclosing a disability at City should be reviewed to ensure the number of students disclosing is accurate, progress on support should then be analysed again. Activity needs to take place to ensure academic staff are skilled and confident in ensuring that Reasonable Adjustments Plans (RAPs) are understood and implemented. The accessibility of digital platforms, as well as campus accessibility, should also be reviewed and monitored with students with a disability in mind.

CityBuddies

CityBuddies should continue to utilise the success of online delivery for some underrepresented students and support students to continue their buddy partnership beyond term one. CityBuddies should consider pairing students up based on lived experience (e.g. BAME students, care experienced students). An expansion of the programme should be strongly considered to provide every first-year student the option of a buddy during induction. As this activity occurs there is space for further collaboration and co-delivery between City and the Union on CityBuddies, particularly regarding creating student communities.

CityCares

As has previously been highlighted CityCares has been an effective support model for the targeted underrepresented students. Greater alignment and collaboration between CityCares and the Union could take place to offer the Union's services such as societies and activities directly to the students CityCares supports.

Working with students

1. What did your university or college tell you about working with students? Please provide a summary of your conversation.

City Students' Union

The Union and the University have worked together on several projects linked to the APP over the past academic year. There are formal mechanisms where contributions made by Sabbatical Officers are involved in the APP. Notably, the Sabbatical Officers have ultimate oversight of the APP sitting on University Council, alongside other members of Council, and through the Education and Student Committee. The Union also has membership of the Student Experience Task and Finish Group where aspects of APP work feed into.

The Union collaborated on a commuter student research project alongside the University which worked to understand more about the commuter student experience.

Recommendations were then submitted to the Education and Student Committee. The Sabbatical Officers were invited to join an Access and Participation Working Group which was suspended in response to COVID-19. City and the Union collaborated on implementing the EDI Reps programme which employs students from each School to be consulted, and to consult on equality and diversity issues.

Student feedback

Student feedback formed the basis of the APP 2019/20 and 2020/21. General direct student feedback was sought from students through several mechanisms. This feedback was not specifically in relation to the APP or from specifically the underrepresented students referenced in the APP.

There are formal ways this has taken place through Student Experience Committees and Student Staff Liaison Committees across Schools and programmes. Other mechanisms that have been utilised include 'school cafes,' surveys and Town Hall events. These are used to understand school and course-based issues. Whilst they do reflect the issues experienced by underrepresented students, follow up work is needed to take place to evaluate issues raised. The Union and City collaborated on the Student Check-ins project which sought 1-2-1 feedback from just over 5,000 students and offered peer to peer support over the phone in Term 1 and Term 2. Annual student feedback mechanisms have operated this year such as NSS, PTES and Your Voice 1 and 2.

Communications

The aspects and the activity linked to the APP is embedded in various streams of work across the University. Whilst all students may not be aware of the APP, City regularly communicates messages to students regarding inclusivity and empowering all students. City established a Student Communications Project to communicate messages which can target particular students with specific messages relating to APP activity.

Moving forward

The University plans to embed student voice further into APP activities by introducing a continuous evaluation cycle to ensure that work is being monitored, improved and that the impact is maximised as the year progresses. City also aims to gain more student input through employment opportunities such as focus groups and consultation. City intends to develop the EDI Ambassador Scheme and use the EDI Steering Group to monitor and evaluate the work of the APP.

2. From your experience, how are students involved in a) delivering the plan b) monitoring and evaluating the plan. Is this as described in the plan?

A) Delivering the Plan

As part of the research to support the Student Submission five focus groups took place each with attendees from a particular underrepresented group: BAME students, care leavers, students with a disability, mature students, students from low participation neighbourhoods (LPN). It is clear from these focus groups that students are not aware of the APP. Students are instead aware of the activities involved in the APP. This is because the APP is not communicated to students but instead it is embedded in other work streams across City that focus on inclusivity and empowering students.

Students we spoke to commented that they had been a City Buddy. This had been a rewarding experience and allowed them to develop personal and professional skills. There were also students who had been employed by UniTemps in University roles and had delivered other aspects of activity. Students are also involved in applicant visit days and open days for prospective students to provide the student perspective to life at City.

B) Monitoring and Evaluating the Plan

Students' Union

Positively, Sabbatical Officers are regularly included in spaces to evaluate and sign off on APP related activity. These forums are often busy and therefore do not typically provide the appropriate setting to evaluate some of the important detail in the APP. The Sabbatical Officers are regularly consulted on student facing communications relating to APP activity, such as the Hardship Fund.

The APP in its nature is particularly inaccessible for students to evaluate. It is not communicated as a student facing plan but instead its work is embedded across various strategies at City. Nevertheless, more could be done to educate both the members of formal committees who have oversight of the APP in terms of context, targets, and activities.

EDI Reps

The EDI Reps are a partnership between City and the Union and employ students from each School to research and interrogate EDI issues at City. In its early stages, the programme provided a great opportunity to monitor APP activity around the Student Attainment Project and Decolonising the Curriculum activity taking place.

Feedback

Students receive regular requests for general feedback through the formal and informal manners described in the APP and previously in this Submission. This does often rely on the good will of students and are often most effective when incentivised. The feedback sought is not directly in relation to the APP. Students we spoke to describe experiences being requested for evaluation feedback following APP activities such as CityBuddies, CityCares and Mental Health Services.

3. At your university or college, do you think there is enough student involvement in: a) delivering the plan b) monitoring and evaluating the plan?

A) Delivering the Plan

At present there is scope for students to be more involved in delivering aspects of the APP. This could be by providing students with paid employment opportunities to assist with delivering activity. City has committed as part of its plan to ensuring that students are heavily

involved with the APP delivery. As City moves beyond responding to the immediate changes brought about by COVID-19, there is space to begin to consider how students can be, and should be more involved in delivering the APP.

B) Monitoring and Evaluating the Plan

The current ways that students are involved with monitoring and evaluating the plan (highlighted previously) are incredibly important. It is crucial to have a blend of formal and informal feedback mechanisms to capture student opinion on the APP. Feedback from the Union, school feedback, mass insight activities, activity evaluation and Sabbatical Officer views are all vital components of monitoring the APP. There is opportunity to embed students further (listed in the suggestion section below) in monitoring and evaluating the plan and ultimately increase the student engagement and involvement.

4. Are students from a range of backgrounds able to get involved in delivering, monitoring and evaluating the plan? How does your university or college ensure this?

City currently provides a wide variety of mechanisms for students to provide feedback. City uses formal feedback mechanisms to understand the views of students from a range of backgrounds. Annual Programme Evaluation (APE) activities provide students from all backgrounds the opportunity to comment on the City student experience. Informal feedback mechanisms such as surveys have been a successful tool in delivering student feedback on the APP.

City could improve by introducing more opportunities for specific groups of students to comment on their experiences. This work has clearly begun through the introduction of the EDI Reps and this is positive. Further work should be conducted to provide underrepresented students the opportunity to provide feedback through focus groups and other activities. From our focus groups with students, the importance of closing the feedback loop is clear in ensuring underrepresented students feel listened to.

5. During your conversation, did you make any suggestions about what your university or college could do to improve student involvement in the plan? If so, what did you suggest?

There are multiple ways that student involvement could be developed and increased to ensure that students are involved in delivering, monitoring and evaluating City's APP. There have been understandable delays in APP work because of the COVID-19 pandemic. These areas suggested combine restarting areas of student involvement that have been halted and introducing new mechanisms for the involvement of students and feedback on aspects of the APP.

Access and Participation Working Group

The APP Working Group with Sabbatical Officer representation, suspended in response to the COVID-19, should be started. This group would bring together key City staff leading the APP, Sabbatical Officers and Union staff representation. This would provide a space to monitor the progress of the APP throughout the year. It would enable student evaluation to feed into the work of the APP. The group would be able to action research and consultation to understand the experiences of underrepresented students. The working group could action activity to address issues raised and the concerns of underrepresented students. The Sabbatical Officers would also provide student monitoring and evaluation on the working group. Having Union staff representation would allow for further strategic alignment between the Union's work and the APP.

Student Advisory Group

The introduction of a Student Advisory Group would enable regular monitoring and evaluation of APP activity and progress against targets. This advisory group would educate students on the APP work that City is undertaken. Importantly the Student Advisory Group could provide consultation for proposed activity to address the equality gaps laid out in the APP.

Focus Groups

Regular focus groups should be utilised to consult on APP related activity. As highlighted by the focus groups conducted to support the Student Submission, focus groups can provide insights into the experiences of the specific underrepresented groups targeted in the APP. Termly focus groups should be introduced throughout the year to address specific APP related activity. These focus groups can be utilised when research is conducted to address specific issues for underrepresented students e.g. conducting focus groups with students with a disability about the accessibility of online resources.

Communication

Work should take place to understand how to communicate the APP activity taking place to students in the focus groups and to the wider City student community. This should involve collaboration between the Union and City staff and where possible utilise different medias (eg. Videos).

Paid Roles for Students

The EDI Reps are an exemplary demonstration of students being used to deliver the APP. There are other opportunities for paid roles to be given to students, particularly those underrepresented students the APP targets, to contribute to delivering activity. Increasing the number of paid students in part time roles in Professional Services would provide students with experience in professional environments. Students should understand the aims of the project and how activities support and empower students in line with the Education and Student Strategy. As new activity is introduced across City's Professional Services considerations should be made to understand how part time student workers could be involved in planning and delivery.

Feedback mechanisms

The closure of the feedback loop is a persistent theme that appeared when we spoke to students. Whilst it is apparent that City have several formal and informal feedback mechanisms, many students raised that they do not know what happens once they have provided their feedback. Work should continue to ensure that the feedback loop is closed. The introduction of a digital feedback mechanism that allows students to access what action has resulted from their feedback would be a useful tool. It is positive to see that City has committed to introducing a mechanisms for this purpose.

COVID-19

1. Are there any groups of underrepresented students who you consider to have been particularly badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic?

The impact of the pandemic on the student experience and particularly the teaching and learning experience has been profound. Students from LPNs have been particularly affected.

A digital divide has been created through the, understandably necessary, shift to online learning. Students we spoke to described having a lack of space to study at home, limited access to computers and laptops and poor Wi-Fi. Lack of space to study at home was, anecdotally, an issue often caused by crowded houses, multiple people working in a house during national lockdowns and siblings at learning at home whilst schools were closed. These issues were particularly pronounced amongst students from a LPN, however were apparent amongst BAME students and care experienced students that we spoke to.

Three significant mitigations that City has put in place to tackle this are the Hardship Fund, the Digital Inclusion Fund and opening access to study space on campus. These are impressive interventions which have clearly had a positive impact on the teaching and learning experience of these students affected by digital poverty.

Students from LPN we spoke to however still described issues regarding poor Wi-Fi and lack of space to study. Further to this, the Union's second Student Check-ins Report highlights a significant minority who felt they did not have access to the space and resources to study at home. Whilst the Digital Inclusion Fund takes action to address digital poverty amongst students at City, there are still clearly prominent issues because of online learning. More work should be done to understand what space and resources students have access to, particularly if a blended approach to teaching continues in the next academic year (21/22). Travel costs should also be considered because of how often some students needed to attend campus in order to access adequate space to learn.

2. Please provide a summary of how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted on the experiences of underrepresented students at your university or college.

The pandemic has impacted students both as part of their teaching and learning experience and wider student experience. For most students at City, their university experience in the past academic year has been spent online. This move to almost completely online has had negative impacts for many underrepresented groups of students, as well as some other positive impacts from which City can learn.

Online learning

As previously mentioned, there is a clear digital divide amongst students who do not have access to the space and resources they need to study and learn at home. There are issues regarding lack of Wi-Fi, lack of technology, nervousness about travelling to campus during lockdown and lack of space at home. These have clearly had an impact on the wellbeing of students. It is important to monitor progress against targets to ensure that the changes to online learning do not exacerbate pre-existing inequalities that are not mitigated against.

The move to online learning has had also positive impact for both mature students and students with a disability. Both these groups when we spoke to them described online learning as having improved their experience at City. For students with a disability, they described the benefits of online lecture delivery and having access to materials online being positive in terms of accessibility. Having access to materials in advance of lectures was a new introduction in response to the pandemic and this was again seen as a positive change for students with a disability. For mature students, they described having online lectures as

more convenient and allowing them to balance their studies and other life commitments in a beneficial way. Both these groups of students agreed that as City moves forward there should still be access to synchronous and asynchronous teaching online to aid learning and revision. This is in addition to materials being made available in advance.

Finance

There are financial concerns for underrepresented students many of whom have lost part time or full-time job opportunities. This subsequently has had an impact on students' ability to engage successfully with online learning. BAME students and care experienced students have also raised concern regarding travel costs to access campus regularly to complete online learning.

Wellbeing and Community

There have been significant mental health impacts on underrepresented students caused by the COVID-19. Students we spoke to describe the isolation and loneliness caused by remote learning. The pandemic has resulted in few opportunities for many students to access the campus and fewer opportunities for social interaction to meet peers. There have been less opportunities to find a sense of community or belonging whilst at City in the past academic year. There has clearly been an impact in the opportunities to gain soft skills through extracurricular activity (e.g. sports, societies, networks) that has not been able to take place in the past academic year. Looking ahead this could create issues for progression for underrepresented students who may rely on university to provide these opportunities. Furthermore, issues around community were particularly prominent amongst BAME students who described the need to bring together cultural perspectives whilst at University, an aspect missing through online learning.

Employability

Progression to employment after graduating was raised as a key issue for BAME students, care experienced students and students from LPNs. There were concerns that the COVID-19 has limited opportunities to develop skills required in future employment. They describe having less opportunities to gain experience in the workplace or professional settings. Whilst Careers and Employability at City have clearly and commendably adapted and moved placements online to include Mirco Placements, there has been an impact on student confidence in the job market and a sense that there are less opportunities available to them.

3. Do you think that your university or college has been responsive to student concerns relating to the Covid-19 pandemic? How has your university or college supported students during this period?

City has put in place a vast array of measures to support students and has been responsive to concerns raised by students.

Student Union

There was Sabbatical Officer representation on the Quality and Standards Contingency and Implementation Working Group which oversaw the response to the pandemic. This provided a platform for the elected student representatives to be involved in key decision making. Other meetings took place between Sabbatical Officers and the Deputy President and Director of Student & Academic Services to highlight student issues. The Union has been involved in planning for the next academic year through committees and regular meetings with City.

Listening to Students

Students were listened to on various pandemic concerns. Students formed a petition for a No Detriment Policy; a Safety Net Policy was put in place in response to this. It is significant

to note the role of Union lobbying that triggered some mitigations to be put in place. Due to the introduction of SYAS, after changes to extenuating circumstances in the academic year 19/20, some students do not understand that the student voice was listened to in response to the pandemic. Work is needed to continue to close the feedback loop in a timely manner particular in response to COVID-19 concerns. Students petitioned for 1st year and 2nd year assessments to be cancelled and following this assessment guidance was provided to students.

Financial Support

The Hardship Fund and Digital Inclusion Fund were introduced in response to the pandemic. From speaking to underrepresented students there was a positive reaction to the funds made available. There were some students who we spoke to who were not aware of the funds potentially available to them, particular for students from LPNs. Further work should take place to ensure that students who could access these funds are aware that they are available and are supported in applying for them. Students highlighted that issues of digital poverty and inequality pre-existed the COVID-19 pandemic. It is positive to see City's assurances of collaboration with the Union regarding the future of the Hardship Fund and Digital Inclusion Fund. This will be particularly significant as students return to campus and blended learning becomes integral to the learning experience.

Academic Support

Various academic support measures were put in place to support students. The SYAS process was introduced allowing students to submit request for support without any form of evidence. It is interesting to note the disproportionate number of SYAS submissions from care experienced students and BAME students. Care leavers also submitted a disproportionately higher number of SYAS forms relative to the overall Care Leaver population size. This highlights the necessity of the SYAS process in supporting underrepresented students. A Safety Net Policy was put in place following extensive student lobbying. This supported students by ensuring their degree classification would not be negatively impacted by the pandemic.

Alternative assessments conducted online were put in place and a 24-hour window was introduced to enable to students not in the UK to participate in exams. The 24 hours window was only introduced in the School of Health Sciences, The City Law School and the School of Arts and Social Sciences. It is important to note that students would benefit more if this policy was institution wide and not confined to a selection of schools. From speaking to students, more activity could take place to ensure students have enough time to complete and then upload their exams.

Progression

To support progression Micro Placements were moved online to provide remote work experience opportunities for students. Students we spoke to, in particular care experienced students and LPN students, were extremely positive about the Micro Placements that took place. They described the benefits of the insights into the professional environment that it provided. Other steps put in place include proactive communications regarding the availability of services, online careers events, 1:1 support online, remote volunteering opportunities, bespoke online resources, third party remote internships and the promotion of UniTemps jobs to UK UG 2020 Graduates. The provision of activity in response to COVID-19 to support graduate progression is positive. City should ensure that all students are supported in seeking graduate level employment post-graduation. It is important that underrepresented students are aware of tailored support to limit the exacerbation of inequalities already present in graduate progression. From speaking to students, proactive

communications will be integral to this as students were unaware of many services available to them to aid progression.

Recommendations

1. Targets

- 1.1 Interrogate where targets have narrowed dramatically to learn lessons to carry forward. Particular attention should be paid to the continuation gap target between disabled students and students with no known disability which reduced from 9% in 2017/2018 to 2% in 2018/19.

2. Activities

- 2.1 Monitor the impact of changes to personal tutoring for 21/22, evaluate to ensure the standard of quality is consistent across all Schools. The focus during personal tutoring should be on academic support, wellbeing support and academic community.
- 2.2 Work to introduce activity that builds students social capital and creates a sense of community particularly for BAME students and students with a disability.
- 2.3 City and the Union to collaborate on the Union's Student Communities work to ensure the research supports the APP targets around retention and progression. Consider the role APP funding could be used to support student communities.
- 2.4 Review the criteria for all bursaries available to ensure the criteria are not exclusionary of students from underrepresented groups particularly students from an LPN.
- 2.5 Consider the introduction of a postgraduate student only space to study.
- 2.6 Introduce needs assessments for mature students during registration to ensure support is signposted and mitigations put in place to allow mature students to balance study with other commitments.
- 2.7 Review the disclosure of disability procedure at City to ensure the number of students with a disability at City is accurate. Review progress alongside targets following this review.
- 2.8 Review the accessibility of City's VLE (Moodle) for students with a disability.
- 2.9 City and the Union to work together to increase collaboration on the delivery of CityBuddies. This should enable CityBuddies to continue to utilise the success of online delivery for some underrepresented students to support students to continue their buddy partnership beyond Term 1.

3. Working with students

- 3.1 Restart the APP Working Group to monitor the progress of City's APP particularly in relation to working with students and ensure Union involvement across the entire academic year. Include Union staff representation on the working group in order to more closely align the work of the Union and City's APP.
- 3.2 Increase awareness amongst students about City's APP activity and the Education and Student Strategy to highlight current and future efforts to reduce inequalities at City.
- 3.3 Develop a mechanism to regularly consult students targeted by the APP on targets and activity related to City's APP.
- 3.4 Provide more paid student roles across Professional Services to incorporate students into the delivery of the APP.
- 3.5 Ensure that student consultation takes place at regular intervals throughout the year to monitor City's APP progress. This could be delivered through the introduction of a Student Advisory Panel.
- 3.6 Develop the role of the EDI Reps as part of City's APP work.

4. COVID-19

- 4.1 Investigate the impact of individual and collective mitigations put in place in response to COVID-19 on each group of underrepresented students.

- 4.2 Update the extenuating circumstances procedure that supports students from underrepresented groups where City has targets for continuation in terms of progression and attainment, whilst also maintaining academic integrity.
- 4.3 Continue to make synchronous and asynchronous teaching available to access afterwards to support attainment.