



Measuring educational gain: The University of Manchester case study

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Employers repeatedly say that graduates need to be equipped with more than just a good degree, they need to be able to engage with the challenges we face and provide appropriate solutions. The University of Manchester responds to these observations by adopting the approach that studying at university can, and should, provide a unique and transformative experience. This is done by challenging students existing principles and taking them out of their comfort zones, thereby allowing them to broaden their horizons and deepen their awareness of themselves, their personal communities, as well as the wider local, national, and international communities we are all apart of.

The University of Manchester 2023 provider TEF submission was accompanied by the University of Manchester Student Union (UMSU) Student submission and focused on the two aspects of student experience and student outcomes, across the following four sub-areas: (i) academic experience and assessment, (ii) resources, support and student engagement, (iii) positive outcomes, and (iv) educational gains.

The provider submission included a number of case studies demonstrating excellence and examples of outstanding practice embedding the University's five strategic priority areas for "Teaching, Learning and Students":

- Enhancing the quality of our teaching
- Transformative student experiences
- Realising students' potential: 'Manchester Made Me'
- An education for global leadership
- Lifelong and flexible learning

The Student submission run by the UMSU provided evidence in response to five questions on student experience and three questions on student (positive) outcomes.

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Our reflective case study focuses on three aspects in relation to our institution's submission: and reflections on the practicalities of collecting data for educational gain from our previous pilot work.

Manchester Stellify Awards – Empowering Leaders and Championing Change

Stellify is one of the university's flagship programs that unpins its commitments to personal, social, and global change. Having run successfully since 2016 this three-year program has run in conjunction with undergraduate programs and in September 2023 an equivalent program was launched designed for master's students. Core to both programs is the exploration and enactment of Sustainability, Social Justice, and Workplace Ethics combined with volunteering and undertaking leadership roles with the wider community. Moreover, students are required to undertake self-reflective activities allowing them to consider how their actions have contributed to both their own personal development and that of the wider community. Students record their experiences within their Higher Educational Achievement Report and use this to provide a more sophisticated acknowledgement of their higher educational journey.

Sustainability Champions – Sustainability in a Real-World Context

Alongside the Stellify Awards, students have the opportunity to undertake an interactive online course designed to consider the challenges of planning a new university campus. Through a series of interactive games and activities that allow students to develop knowledge, skills, and understanding of the challenges faced by 21st century society and allows the exploration of sustainability issues that are important to them. Through this experience, students can contextualise their degree through the wider national and global discussions on sustainability thereby enhancing their wider knowledge of the challenges we face as a planet and, by extension, their employability skills.

University College of Interdisciplinary Learning – Widening the Degree Experience

The University of Manchester's College of Interdisciplinary Learning (UCIL) provides a unique opportunity for students to undertake credit bearing units outside of their usual degree program. Open to all undergraduate students, UCIL aims to broaden students' knowledge and experiences by studying something that they may be passionate about. It is unique within the university as it allows students from all disciplines to come together to undertake studies that will support the development of key employability skills such as analytical skills, group and team working, innovation and creativity, problem solving, and problem management either online, face-to-face, or blended.

The UoM case study offers an exemplar for how research in Education Gain can be operationalised in order to more clearly tell the rich and complex story of student learning. By working closely with the UMSU during the previous Learning Gain pilot, we were able to offer

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a research-based position on what Education Gain involves, and then apply our broader thinking to individual examples of student learning. This moves us away from narrowly configured assessments of 'gain', driven by proxies for ability on entry and ability on graduation, towards a more holistic picture of how students develop as critical thinkers and campus citizens during their programme. The framework provided by our Education Gain research allows us to conceptualise this growth in terms of personal confidence, peer-to-peer engagement and application of knowledge, as exemplified by UoM initiatives, like Stellify and others detailed above, which go beyond discipline-level, curriculum-based knowledge acquisition. The examples provided potentially bring new perspectives to the learning process and enable students and institutions to better articulate how students grow as individuals and as a cohort during their time at university.

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