

## Better teaching at Southampton



### How do we make teaching at Southampton better?

Over 2000 people have responsibility for teaching students at the University of Southampton. The university has numerous ways for making sure that students have the best possible learning experience. The education work of the university is led by [Professor Alex Neill](#), the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Education.

1. Training, teaching, developing and mentoring all teaching staff,
2. Listening to the student voice
3. Assuring that our teaching programmes are of good quality.

### Training, teaching, developing and mentoring all teaching staff

All staff who are new to teaching in higher education must take a part-time masters level course called the [Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice](#) or PCAP. Teaching staff have to pass two modules: [Module 1: Learning and Teaching in Higher Education](#) and [Module 2: Enhancing the student learning experience](#). On successful completion the lecturer is also awarded the nationally recognised [Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy](#) (FHEA). It is run by the Professional Development Unit and the School of Education.

Postgraduate (usually PhD) students who teach are able to study for The Postgraduate Induction to Learning and Teaching (or PILT). On successful competition they are awarded the nationally recognised [Associate Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy](#) (AFHEA).



Learning opportunities are not only available to new staff. The [Professional Development Unit](#) (PDU) offers short courses to help lecturers develop their existing skills and knowledge and learn new skills, for example in using technology in the classroom. Specialist units such as the [Medical Education Development Unit](#) (MEDU), The Centre for Innovation in Technologies and Education (CITE) and the [LLAS Centre for](#)

[Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies](#) also offer short courses for lecturers. The Higher Education Academy and professional bodies also provide staff development.

Every member of staff has an annual performance review. Performance in teaching is an important part of this and lecturers and their line manager can use this review to discuss teaching and possible areas for development. Teaching is also taken into account when lecturers apply for promotion. More experienced lecturers can apply to be a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education (SFHEA) or a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education (PFHEA). They are allocated a mentor to help them through this process. We are also fortunate to have a number of [National Teaching Fellows](#) (NTF) at Southampton. The National Teaching Fellowship Scheme is very competitive and only a small number of fellowships are available each year. NTF status recognises that a lecturer has made an important impact on teaching not only at Southampton, but also on a national or international level.

Each faculty has an associate dean who is responsible for overseeing education in their faculty. The Associate Dean is a senior member of academic staff who is supported by discipline heads, quality officers and in some faculties teaching and learning coordinators. The associate deans meet regularly with each other, their own faculty deans and the PVC for Education.

### **Listening to the student voice**

At the end of every module students are invited to fill in an end of module questionnaire. Feedback from student can help lecturers to improve their teaching and the content of the module. Students elect a VP for Academic Affairs, Faculty Leaders, Academic Presidents and Course Reps through the [Southampton University Students Union \(SUSU\)](#). These student representatives periodically meet with teaching staff to discuss matter relating the university's courses.

Many lecturers offer students the opportunity to discuss and evaluate the course during a teaching session. Others also offer opportunities to discuss different aspects of the course through social media such as Facebook or Twitter.

### **National Student Survey**

All final year students are invited to respond the [National Student Survey \(NSS\)](#) which has taken place every year since 2005. The NSS has 23 questions on everything from over satisfaction, employability, assessment and teaching resources. The NSS is very important as it enables us to compare Southampton with other universities. The NSS also allows students to make open comment on their course—these comments can be especially helpful in identifying specific issues.

The university also participates in the Higher Education Academy's [Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey \(PTES\)](#) and [Postgraduate Research Experience Survey \(PRES\)](#). These are no public surveys like the NSS, but are very useful to the university in improving the student experience at postgraduate level.

The University has internal procedures for complaints and academic appeals which are outlined on the student section of the [university website](#). SUSU can provide advice and support to students with complaints or concerns. If complaints or appeals are not resolved a student may decide to submit their case to the [Office of the Independent Adjudicator \(OIA\)](#) (see below).

### **External Quality Assurance**

#### **The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)**

Like all higher education institutions in the UK, Southampton must meet the standards outlined in the Quality Code of Higher Education run by the [Quality Assurance Agency \(QAA\)](#). Although the QAA does not inspect teaching directly the Quality Code is very extensive.

The purpose of the Quality Code is:

- to safeguard the academic standards of UK higher education
- to assure the quality of the learning opportunities that UK higher education offers to students
- to promote continuous and systematic improvement in UK higher education
- to ensure that information about UK higher education is publicly available.
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Academic staff, in partnership with Faculty Quality Officers, is responsible to ensure that all Southampton's activities fulfil the requirements of the Code. If the QAA reviewers are not satisfied they can offer a judgement of 'limited confidence' or 'no confidence'. The QAA can investigate concerns academic standards and quality and about public information. The Office for the

Independent Adjudicator (OIA) is usually a more appropriate avenue for the complaints that affect individual students.

### **External examiners**

An external examiner is appointed for each degree programme at Southampton. The external examiner is an academic from another university who acts as a 'critical friend' commenting on curriculum content, standards and a sample of student work. Although he or she has no direct powers, the external examiner helps to ensure that the curriculum is up to date, and that standards are comparable with other universities.

### **Professional bodies**

Some courses, e.g. Medicine and Engineering are accredited (recognised) by professional bodies as well as by the University. Representatives of these professional bodies periodically review the curriculum, academic standards and teaching of these programmes. Professional accreditation is mandatory for graduates wishing to enter certain professions so it essential that the University remains in good standing with these bodies.

### **Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)**

The IOA was set up after the 2004 Higher Education Act to review individual students' complaints about a university. The IOA only reviews cases in which individual students feel they have been treated unfairly, e.g. on grounds of disability or illness, and does not deal with general concerns about the quality of teaching (which are addressed by the QAA). Additionally, the OIA will usually only consider complaints made after procedures within the universities have been exhausted.

Watch interviews of University of Southampton staff saying what good feedback means to them at <http://blog.soton.ac.uk/gmoof/making-teaching-better/>

More about feedback at <http://blog.soton.ac.uk/gmoof/>