

THE UNIVERSITY OF BUCKINGHAM
TEF 2023 PROVIDER SUBMISSION

1. PROVIDER CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The University of Buckingham was established as a not-for-profit registered charity in 1976 and was incorporated by Royal Charter (RC000730) on February 11th, 1983. It is registered as an Approved Provider with the Office for Students (UKPRN: 10007787) and is a registered charity (Number 1141691). It is authorised by its Royal Charter to award taught and research degrees in perpetuity. The University is a member of Universities UK.
- 1.1.2 The founders of the University were driven by a desire to create an educational institution that was rigorously independent in its thinking. While this ethos remains, it has been complemented by an emphasis on designing and delivering academic provision in ways that are innovative, flexible, and focused on the student experience.
- 1.1.3 the University is less than a fifth of the size of the average UK HEI,¹ yet prides itself on its range of undergraduate and postgraduate provision, offering courses across ten major subject areas, with rare combinations and niche specialisms within these.

1.2 2017 and 2019 TEF outcomes; QAA monitoring

- 1.2.1 In 2017 The University of Buckingham had ‘double positive flags’ for all six of the core metrics used for TEF1 and was the only UK Higher Education Provider to have achieved this ‘clean sweep’. In making a Gold award in its statement of findings in June 2017 the panel commented that the university’s ‘metrics, supplemented by the submission, indicate that students from all backgrounds achieve consistently outstanding outcomes across all metrics. Very high proportions progress to employment or further study, notably exceeding the provider’s benchmarks. The metrics indicate outstanding levels of satisfaction with academic support that are also significantly above benchmark.’²
- 1.2.2 The University participated voluntarily (one of 45 HEIs to do so) in the 2018–19 (2nd round) TEF Subject-level pilot, submitting in eight areas: Business and Management; Computing; Economics; English Studies; History; Law; Politics; and Psychology, as well as at Provider level. In its Statement of Findings for the university, the panel judged that ‘the totality of the evidence best fits the descriptor of the Silver rating’.³
- 1.2.3 The University’s last QAA *Higher Education Review (Alternative Providers)* was published in January 2018. The final report records that ‘The University was first reviewed by QAA in 2001, with all subsequent reviews confirming that expectations for quality and standards have been consistently met.’⁴ As Alternative Providers were also required to participate in Annual Review for Specific Course Designation, a Monitoring Visit report was also published in January 2019 (overlapping with the reporting period of TEF 2023 for such aspects as Completion and Progression) which concluded that ‘The University has made commendable progress against its action plan’ and was continuing ‘the good practice identified in the last review’.⁵

1.3 Institutional changes, 2017–present

- 1.3.1 At undergraduate level the main change in provision here since 2017 has been the accreditation of its MBChB (February 2019) and subsequent growth of its Medical School

and Allied Health offering, based both at the Buckingham campus and, since January 2020, at a dedicated health sciences campus in Crewe. It has continued to deliver undergraduate programmes in all of the eight subject areas noted above, plus Modern Foreign Languages, with only minor changes.

- 1.3.2 A significant structural change aimed at rationalising and improving administrative support for the student journey took place 2020(Q4)–2021(Q2), when the existing schools of the university were combined into four Faculties, each with its own Registrar, administrative team and designated Quality Managers. At the same time a new Directorate of Student Support Services was established, bringing specialists in student wellbeing, the student voice, inclusivity, academic skills, library and information services under one umbrella, reporting into a senior member of the University’s Executive Group. The four Faculties are: Business, Humanities and Social Sciences (**FBHS**); Computing, Law and Psychology (**FCLP**); Medicine and Health Sciences (**FMHS**); and Education (**FEDU**). Currently, the latter offers postgraduate courses only.

1.4 Information about the University’s educational mission and strategic aims

- 1.4.1 As articulated in its five-year working *Strategy for 2023–2027*, the University’s Vision is *to inspire independent, critical thinkers and resilient professionals, equipping them for lifelong learning and to lead the change we need* and its Mission is to continue *inspiring and empowering individuals through excellence in education, research and sharing knowledge*.⁷ Alongside its working *Strategy*, the University has also recently approved 5-year frameworks and strategies for *Learning and Teaching*, for *Assessment*, and for *Research*, also covering the period from 2023–2027.⁸ These articulate a principles-based approach to academic provision, by which the Faculties together seek to encapsulate what is distinctive about the University’s approach to teaching and research and how it seeks to continue to excel in ways that demonstrably exceed general registration conditions for quality, standards and student outcomes.⁹

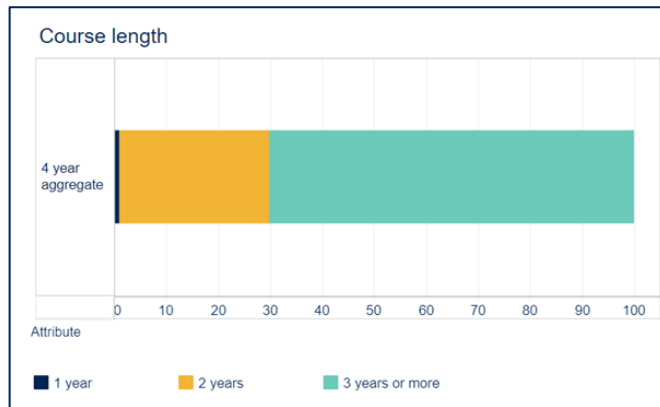
1.5 Information about the size and shape of the University’s provision and the characteristics of its UG students and courses

While there is much that is radically traditional about the university and its ethos, there is much in its provision and the profile of its students that is distinctive.

- 1.5.1 The University’s pioneering **accelerated undergraduate degrees** follow two broadly similar models: those which students commence in January and which are completed in two calendar years; and those which commence in September and complete by December of the second year after entry. The Buckingham academic calendar for FBHS and FCLP comprises four terms of roughly equal length corresponding to the four quarters of the year, with no extended summer break for either staff or students. Its accelerated degrees are thus of 2 years/8 terms or 2¼ years/9 terms in duration, with cohorts studying together for their final 6 terms. Typically, larger numbers of UK-domiciled ‘home’ students start in September than in January, while this ratio is reversed amongst non-UK-domiciled ‘international’ students.
- 1.5.2 The accelerated degree model has, broadly, three advantages when compared to the conventional three-year archetype:
- the continuous learning and teaching process allows for a steadier pattern of knowledge and skills acquisition – with a consequent reduction in the potential for

- learning loss¹⁰ during a lengthy summer vacation. See section 3.4.
- ii. the similarity of the academic year to that of the world-of-work is recognised by employers as a better preparation for life after university;¹¹ and
- iii. the overall cost to the student, taking into account the combined effects of tuition fee, living expenses and earlier labour-market entry, is significantly less.¹²

The representation in the TEF 2023 data dashboard of ‘Course length’ is potentially



misleading, as it significantly *under-represents* the numbers of students on accelerated degrees studying at Buckingham. This is because students on the 2¼ year/9 term model, when viewed on the assumption that academic years begin in the Autumn, are deemed to study across three different academic years, and hence are included in the ‘three

years or more’ category for course length. The graphic here indicates that over the 4-year aggregate, 70.1% of the University’s undergraduate students studied courses of length ‘3 years or more’, with only 29% studying programmes of ‘2 years’, whereas the university’s internal data, also HESA-derived, puts these figures instead at 43% and 57% respectively.

HESA Year	2- or 2¼-year programmes	%	3 or 3+ Year Programmes (including MBChB)	%
2018/19	945	62	578	38
2019/20	953	59	667	41
2020/21	823	51	796	49
Aggregate	2712	57	2041	43

- 1.5.3 The University’s **commitment to small-group teaching** is real. Throughout the TEF 2023 period, we continued to commit to regular weekly teaching across Levels 4 to 6 in tutorial groups of not more than eight students.¹³ Our *2023–2027 Strategy* reiterates this commitment. Combined with seminars, workshops, access hours, and one-to-one supervision of major projects and dissertations, this means between a third and a half of our students’ contact time with staff is experienced in small groups, with tutorials typically run by module leaders, rather than delegated to assistants.¹⁴

This means even the largest lectures are small in comparison with sector averages.

- 1.5.4 Following the Browne review and since September 2012, the **overall cost of Buckingham accelerated degrees** (excluding the MBChB) has always been less in total than those charged by Approved (Fee Cap) providers.¹⁵ However, as the amount available annually to Buckingham UK-domiciled ‘home’ students via SLC ‘loans’ is set by Government at levels significantly less than our annual fees, there is typically a funding gap. To address this disparity, the University has introduced ‘slow-track’/non-accelerated 3-year variations of its provision across FBHS and FCLP, which help reduce

the funding gap for applicants who choose this route. We have also partnered with the FCA-regulated company StepEx, to offer home students (uniquely, we believe, for UK undergraduates) 'Future Earnings Agreements' to improve access still further.¹⁶

- 1.5.5 Similarly, the **reduced UK maintenance costs** made possible for international students by accelerated degrees impacts on the 'Domicile' and on the 'Ethnicity' profiles of our undergraduates (as outlined in TEF datasets for 'Size and Shape of Provider'). For all OfS Providers, the 4-year aggregates for 'EU' and 'Other international' domiciled undergraduates were 5.8% and 11.1% respectively (**16.9%** non-UK in total). For Buckingham these were 4.9% and 39% (**43.9% in total**).
- 1.5.6 Because the count of students in the White, Other, Mixed, Black, and Asian attributes within 'Ethnicity' is restricted to students who are UK-domiciled, direct comparisons of these attributes between providers and the sector for student populations as a whole are made complex. For Buckingham, for example, 45.5% of undergraduates fall into the 'Unknown or not applicable' (because not UK-domiciled) category, as against 17.7% across the sector. However, even within the restricted sample of UK domiciled students, Buckingham's proportions of White, Black and Asian students (25.6%, 9.3% and 14.4%) are distinctly different to those within the sector (56.7%, 7.8%, 11.9%), giving substance to the University's claim to **an unusually diverse student body**.
- 1.5.7 Our reputation for accelerated degrees also impacts in turn on the 'Age on entry' profile of Buckingham undergraduate students, given the possibilities it affords for students who seek university qualifications several years after leaving secondary education. For the same 4-year aggregate, **40.1% of our undergraduates were aged 21 or over on entry**, nearly double the sector average of 21.8%.
- 1.5.8 And given the above, it is unsurprising that the 'Entry Qualifications' profile should also be different, giving rise to important considerations. At Buckingham, an unusually high number of undergraduates on full-time study routes are recorded as already having '**HE-qualifications on entry**': **25.7%** as opposed to **8.7%** in the sector as a whole. Indeed, out of 101 institutions with recorded aggregates of UG students for the period, only 7 have higher proportions of entrants with HE-level qualifications on entry than Buckingham, and only 3 of these are universities.¹⁷ Yet, para. 72 of the *TEF Guidance* document for providers makes the pertinent observation that

where a Level 5 or 6 qualification is a normal condition for course entry [...w]e consider these courses to be 'postgraduate in time', as students will already have completed an undergraduate qualification, and will engage differently to those without previous higher education experience.

This is given as a reason for not including the experience of such students in the 'Courses in scope' for TEF 2023, as this would not be comparing like with like. It is worth bearing in mind that, although their prior HE qualifications are never a condition for course entry, over a quarter of the University of Buckingham's undergraduates are in some important sense 'postgraduate in time' and therefore it is likely they will engage with internal and external surveys of their experience in ways that are different—if not more discerning and discriminating—to those without previous HE experience.¹⁸

1.6 'Optional' courses

- 1.6.1 The University has a long history of partnering with institutions both in the UK and in EU-candidate and transcontinental countries to grant awards for validated-only

undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Its major trans-national education (TNE) validations are for the International Business School, Budapest

the Sarajevo School of Science and Technology in Bosnia & Herzegovina

In the UK we validate a **Graduate Certificate** for the Cheshire and Merseyside Training Hubs and the BA Fashion Communication for Condé Nast College of Fashion and Design, London

- 1.6.2 We have recently started offering **short professional courses** at Level 7 in International Trade Economics in partnership with KPMG which can be combined into a PGCert (commenced Spring 2022; 12-month completion horizon) but do not offer micro-credential courses at undergraduate level staircasing to a qualification.¹⁹
- 1.6.3 The University offers no undergraduate **Apprenticeships** but does offer the Postgraduate Teacher Apprenticeship with QTS at Level 6. The first cohort which commenced Spring 2021, has now completed with a continuation rate of 94.1% and pass rate of 100% amongst those that completed the End Point Assessment (EPA). A second cohort of students commenced in August 2022. The 'Completion Survey' of student satisfaction showed 100% of the first cohort agreeing that the training they had received 'has been of high quality'; that the Apprenticeship 'has made me a good or better teacher'; that the training the University provided 'has supported me in being able to demonstrate' the required learning outcomes.²⁰
- 1.6.4 The University looks forward to including information on how we ensure excellent outcomes for students on all these optional courses in our provider submission for the next iteration of the TEF, by which time, indeed, it may be mandatory to do so. **None are currently covered by this provider submission.**

1.7 Other information about the context of the submission

- 1.7.1 The University of Buckingham is mandated by its Royal Charter 'to advance learning and knowledge by teaching and research'. The latter is as important to us as the former. However, as an Approved Provider, the University is not required to participate in the **Research Excellence Framework (REF)** and would not receive QR funding if we did so, nor are our researchers eligible to apply directly for funding via UKRI. In spite of this, the University has an active research culture, and prepared a pilot submission for REF 2021, including an approved Code of Practice and externally-reviewed selection of outputs and impact cases studies in 9 Units of Assessment—i.e. across all of our major subject areas.²¹ We made no final submission, but throughout the period covered by TEF 2023 our high proportion of research-active staff were delivering teaching enhanced by this work to contribute to the academic experience of our students.²²
- 1.7.2 As outlined in 1.51 and 2.5, the University academic calendar and Student Union appointments, including that of student Academic Representatives, runs on a January-to-December timetable, meaning that the TEF 2023 submission deadline comes a few days after an incoming group of Sabbatical Officers and representatives takes up post. In spite of the challenge, given strong student desire for involvement and for their voice to be heard, a **Student Submission** has been prepared during the fortnight before the January (Winter) Term commences, primarily by incoming Academic Reps with assistance from former representatives who were undergraduates during the period of data collection. The student authors were supported by Registry, the Vice Chancellor's

Office/Dean of Academic Affairs over the submission and had access to a wide range of documentation via a dedicated Teams channel and during a series of workshops.

- 1.7.3 Schools and universities worldwide experienced the **Covid-19 pandemic** in different ways and to differing degrees of intensity. The University of Buckingham, with its highly international student population, was hit hard. However, we transferred our small-group teaching ethos to remote and blended forms of delivery, maintaining real-time/live tutorials and accommodated student groups in widely different time zones. At the height of the first UK lockdown we undertook an **extensive ‘Online Teaching and Learning’** survey, the results of which were widely shared across the Faculties in order to maintain and improve standards of provision.²³ These indicated that 70% or more of respondents were satisfied with their online teaching and learning experience in 10 out of 13 areas, with key challenges being identified in groupwork, note-taking and real-time lecture interaction, all of which were addressed through additional VLE plug-ins and sharing of best practice. Responses to the additional Covid-19 related questions in the 2021 NSS complement this picture at the national level, with Buckingham’s averaged satisfaction rate **+7.3 %points above the sector average**.²⁴ Our postgraduate students, and in particular, research students, echoed this.²⁵

2. STUDENT EXPERIENCE

2.1 ‘The teaching on my course’

The benchmark for this aspect is 81.7% and the observed NSS-based indicator was +3.7 %points above, with an 88.6% proportion of statistical uncertainty distribution materially above the benchmark, suggesting the initial interpretation that this feature of the student experience at the University of Buckingham provides strong statistical evidence of ‘outstanding quality’.

- 2.1.1 The University has set out its ambitions to maintain its high reputation for teaching quality in its *Learning and Teaching Strategy and Framework, 2023-2027*, which explains how the University encapsulates best practice in learning and teaching across its undergraduate and taught courses based around 10 key ‘Principles and Parameters’ and how we do so in ways that are built around our distinctive forms of provision, including the accelerated degree model and our commitment to small-group teaching.²⁶ During the period 2019-2022 we were also oriented by the **aim of exceeding benchmark in the NSS teaching indicator** in all relevant subjects by 2023 as one of its KPIs. We achieved this for all subjects where data was reported.²⁷
- 2.1.2 The University **systematically surveys its students** across all aspects of its academic provision. The survey results are aggregated on a six-monthly and annual basis, reviewed periodically by module leaders and programme directors, and can be viewed in real-time using data dashboards in E-Vision, the University’s SITS-based Content Management System. Sampling these for ‘Teaching and Assessment’ for the earliest and latest years indicates the following:

Year 1 (2019) Internal Survey <i>Teaching & Assessment</i> based on EvaSys indicator:	83.8% ²⁸
Year 1 TEF SE Teaching Benchmark set for University of Buckingham:	83.6%

It is reassuring to note that when based on **perception of teaching quality canvassed on a module-by-module basis**—a more granular way of tracking the student experience—the benchmark is exceeded.

**EXTERNAL EXAMINER
OVERVIEW REPORTS 1
TEACHING AND COURSE
DESIGN**

From 2018 Overview Report

expert teaching and breadth of learning opportunities (FBHS/Digital News) excellent teaching (FBHS/MFL) impressive dedication and commitment of the programme team' (FCLP/ Computing)

From 2019 Overview Report

the small staff team show great dedication to bring the best of research enriched education to [their] students (FBHS/English Studies) excellent communication ... high quality teaching evident (FCLP/Psychology)

From 2019 Overview Report

The commitment of the team to the highest quality teaching and assessment is exemplary (FBHS History) programme appears to be well placed, imaginative and well delivered by a dedicated and hard-working team (FMHS/Biomedical Science)

From 2021 Overview Report

'consistent good practice across the board cited in the innovative design of the programmes, the support for students to succeed and improved diversification of assessment methods'

Year 4 (July 2022) Internal Survey based on Explorance Blue indicator: **82.5%**²⁹

Year 4 TEF Benchmark set for University of Buckingham **81.7%**

In this instance, although the survey was constructed on slightly different basis, the same corroboration can be noted. Nevertheless, a **drop in student engagement with internal surveys**, first observed during the pandemic, has been noted by the University's Planning team, and is currently subject to a Quality Improvement Plan involving Registry and the new Student Voice Sabbatical Officer.³⁰ University engagement with NSS remains high.

2.1.2 Given our academic calendar, the majority of provision, in terms of academic disciplines, is reviewed not once but twice a year (following Assessment Diets in December and June) by an extensive network of External Examiners.³¹ This generates

Examiner Reports annually, each of which must be responded to but which are also summarised into highly synoptic **External Examiner Overview Reports** reviewed at School, Faculty level and Senate-level to allow our monitoring of assessment and feedback to be gauged in the round, with areas for further improvement put into workstreams and features of best practice/excellence identified. The excerpts given in the sidebar (inevitably selective) indicate that across all Faculties teaching undergraduates, features of very high or outstanding quality are pinpointed.

2.1.3 As outlined in 1.71, in its pilot REF 2021 preparations, a significant proportion of teaching staff with designated research responsibility across 9 of the 10 main subject areas, brought **research insights and scholarly practice** into the undergraduate classroom. We are satisfied that across all our main subject areas our undergraduate students had exposure to teaching delivered and enriched by research-active staff publishing in their disciplines over the period 2014-2021. Many of the outputs are made available under Open Access rules on The University's institutional repository, *B-eAr*.³²

2.1.4 National lockdowns during the pandemic prompted a significant shift to **online teaching and learning**. Undergraduate students responded extremely positively both in national surveys and in the internal surveys referenced in 1.73. **76.7%** of respondents Strongly/Agreed that online course provision was working well, that they were able to learn at their own pace (**73%**), that the pre-recorded lectures offered in addition to live sessions were easy to follow (**74.8%**), that they had the ability to ask lecture-based question in spite of them being pre-recorded (**69.2%**) and that questions about course

content were being answered (**76.7%**). Crucially, given the emphasis the university places on small-group teaching and tutorial discussion, **76.8%** of respondents agreed that online tutorials were easy to follow and participate in.

2.2 Assessment and feedback

The benchmark for this aspect is 68.1% and the observed NSS-based indicator for the University was +2.0 %points with 100% of the statistical uncertainty distribution either broadly in line with or materially above the benchmark (64.3%+35.7%), suggesting the initial interpretation that this feature of the student experience at the University of Buckingham provides compelling statistical evidence of being ‘very high quality’.

2.2.1 The University sets out its 12 main principles and parameters for achieving best practice in feedback and assessment in its *Assessment Strategy and Framework, 2023-2027*.³³ During the period 2019-2022 we were also oriented by the aim of exceeding benchmark in the NSS Assessment indicators, which we achieved for 6 of the 8 subject groups for which data was available.³⁴

2.2.2 Sampling and comparing the relevant indicator from internal surveys with TEF 2023 NSS-based indicators and external results (Year 1, earliest) and 2022 (Year 4, most recent), is again instructive:

Year 1 (2019) Internal Survey based on EvaSys indicator:	83.8% ³⁵
Year 1 TEF SE Assessment Benchmark set for University of Buckingham:	71.0%
Year 4 (July 2022) Internal Survey based on Explorance Blue indicator:	70.0% ³⁶
Year 4 TEF Benchmark set for University of Buckingham	64.6%

In each case, the granular internal survey data at modular or programme level exceeds the benchmark and corroborates the observed indicator.

2.2.4 Given their wide-ranging role in overseeing assessment and feedback at programme level, and the rich qualitative data afforded by the twice-yearly reporting outlined in 2.1.2, the

EXTERNAL EXAMINER OVERVIEW REPORTS 2 ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK

From 2018 Overview Report

innovative marking grids enabling candidates to see where they have excelled and where they can improve (Art History) clear evidence of marking and double marking with appropriate comments made (Business & Management) thorough and diverse range of assessment methods ... very high standards demonstrated in undergraduate ... projects (Computing) thorough and appropriate feedback on all assessed work ... a distinctive range of assessment options (Economics) constructive and supportive feedback on assignments (Law) diverse assessment types ... high achievers stretched and challenged (Psychology)

From 2019 Overview Report

assessment methods varied and fully appropriate, combining all the different skills (FBHS/Modern Languages) high standard ...to which the department records comments and feeds back on students work (FBHS/Economics & IS) rigorous marking and assessment processes (FMHS) substantial support available for students that is individualised and effective (FCLP/Psychology)

From 2020 Overview Report

performing extremely well in its assessment, examination and awards processes (FBHS/Business & Management) strong mixture of assessment methods in the programmes mixing traditional and innovative assessment strategies (FBHS/Hums&SS) exemplary in assessment practices ... imaginative and topical exam questions (International Human Rights module) (FCLP/Law) examiners particularly impressed by the innovative approach to the running and moderation of OSCEs ... excellent practice (FMHS)

synoptic commentary in the **External Examiner Overview Reports**, sampled in the blue side bar above, affords a good summary of the very high levels of attention to detail paid to this aspect of the student experience by our teaching teams. Indeed, as Neves and Brown point out in the *Student Academic Experience Survey 2022*, ‘**quality of feedback**’ was the number 1 area in which the students surveyed wanted to see improvements made.³⁷ The University’s small army of external examiners provides significant testimony to progress and continuing very high standards in this area, and our *Assessment Strategy 2023–27* sets out how we plan develop this still further.

2.3 Academic Support

The benchmark for this aspect is 75% and the observed NSS-based indicator for the University was +4.7 %points, with 97.7% of the statistical uncertainty distribution materially above the benchmark, suggesting the initial interpretation that this feature of the student experience at the University of Buckingham provides compelling statistical evidence of being ‘outstanding quality’.

- 2.3.1 The University has committed to **reflecting ‘thoughtfully on our teaching practice**, making sure our teachers all have time to engage regularly in suitable forms of professional development so as to share the right knowledge and skills with our students’ and details ways in which this is to be systematically achieved in Part B of its *Learning and Teaching Strategy*. This covers professional training and development for staff, which also features prominently in sections 2–4 of the University’s *Research Strategy and Framework*.³⁸ During the period 2019–2022 we were also oriented by the aim of exceeding benchmark in the NSS Academic Support indicators in all relevant subjects by 2023 as one of its KPIs. We achieved this for all subjects where data was reported.³⁹
- 2.3.2 Throughout the TEF 2023 data collection period, the University encouraged staff professional development by bearing the full cost of staff applications for the various grades of **AdvanceHE Fellowship**. Awards were made at FHEA and SFHEA level, achievements formally recognised in successive revisions of the University’s academic promotions criteria. The University now stands committed in its Learning and Teaching Strategy 2023–2027 to delivering the **L7 Apprenticeship Standard for ‘Higher Education Professional’**, with both Teaching and Research routes available. This will be free to all participants.
- 2.3.3 A notable initiative of the lockdowns was the launch of weekly live online **teaching and learning masterclasses** co-ordinated by the University Assessment, Learning and Teaching Committee (UALTC), featuring in-house and guest presenters; these were so warmly received they have continued—and will continue—unabated post-pandemic, with current discussions revolving around how to include presenting and attending within formal annual CPD record-keeping. The aim of the masterclasses is to further promote a culture of excellent academic practice across the Faculties.
- 2.3.4 The latter has already occurred with mandatory **Personal Tutor Development training sessions**, for which certification of attendance is provided for uploading to individual HR records and discussion during annual Personal Development Review (PDR) meetings. The 8 sessions run on a termly cycle, can be booked online, and their impact is monitored through feedback forms shared with presenters. Topics include: Mental Health Awareness, Safeguarding and the Prevent duty, Suicide Prevention and Response,

Cultural Awareness and Unconscious Bias, Supporting Students Academic Skills and Employability.

- 2.3.5 The **Welfare, Skills and Diversity Department (WSD)** of The University offers a range of academic support and wraparound support for student wellbeing, and spearheaded the University's pandemic response services. Each Faculty has a dedicated Mentor, providing 1-to-1 support for students, reporting to our Lead Mentor.
- The much-in-demand **Academic Skills and Know-How (ASK) unit** offers in-sessional 'pop-up' support based in library and social learning spaces, embedded sessions in academic modules, 1-to-1 drop-in and bookable sessions. It reports on engagement quarterly and annually to the Student Support Services directorate, setting strategic targets for growing participation in key areas.⁴⁰
 - The University hosts within ASK a **Royal Literary Fund Writing Fellow**, one of only 59 HEIs in the country to do so, whose remit is to 'offer individual appointments where students can discuss all aspects of their writing, such as structuring an argument, making the essay clearer and improving style. The sessions are free, confidential and independent of the university.'⁴¹
 - The **Dyslexia Support service** runs face-to-face and online screenings with expert follow-up and bookable 1-to-1 sessions with a trained expert, whose recent SAGE monograph, *How to be a Brilliant Dyslexic Student* (ISBN-13 978-1529790818) encapsulates many years of practice-based wisdom and advice. Surveys show very high levels of appreciation for the service.⁴²

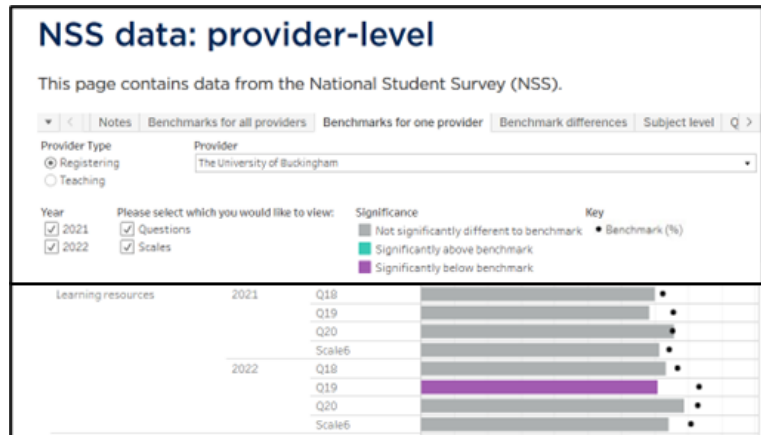
2.4 Learning Resources

The provider benchmark for this feature is 81.5% and the observed NSS-based indicator was -4 % points below this, with 91.3% of the statistical uncertainty distribution materially below the benchmark, suggesting an initial interpretation that this feature of the student experience at the University of Buckingham provides strong statistical evidence that although expectations of high quality may have been satisfied, criteria for very high quality have not been demonstrated. As with other NSS-based indicators, the University's aim was to exceed the relevant benchmark for all subjects and this has not occurred here for all student groups.

This need not be taken as definitive evidence that this feature is not very high quality, but nevertheless the University is aware of this discrepancy in performance and seeks to provide further context and evidence relating to this feature below to allow the panel to form a final judgement.

- 2.4.1 The data shows performance Materially Above individual benchmarks for students of **Computing** and **Law**; exceeding/Broadly in Line with benchmark for **Business and Management**, **Politics**, and **Psychology**; Materially Below (marginally) for **English Studies**; and significantly Materially below for **Economics** and **Medicine**. The latter two groups constitute 24.7% of the student population. Performance in general is slightly better in Years 1 and 2 and slightly worse in the post-pandemic period (Year 3 and 4).
- 2.4.2 Drilling down into the relevant NSS results for 2021 and 2022, it is evident that only in 2022 and only for Q19 ('The library resources ... have supported my learning well') are the University-level results shown as 'significantly below benchmark'.⁴³ **See NSS graphic on p. 11.**

2.4.3 Institutional TEF benchmarks for Learning Resources vary across the sector between 73% and 87%. The overall Buckingham benchmark is **set towards the higher end of this scale** (the 74th highest of 338). In its supplementary documentation for TEF



2023, the OfS explains that while ‘it would be desirable’ to set Materiality borderlines ‘at a level where a reasonable proportion of providers are materially above their benchmark [...] this might not be the case for a given measure.’⁴⁴ Indeed, this is very much not the case for the Learning Resources measure: 19.6% of providers were categorised as ‘Materially below benchmark’ on this metric, a further 21.4% were categorised as ‘Crossing materially below benchmark and broadly in line with benchmark’, whereas only 17.9% were categorised as ‘Broadly in line with benchmark’ and a mere 6.2% were categorised as ‘Materially above benchmark’.⁴⁵ This suggests, potentially, ‘the materiality value is too low’, at least for judgments made below the benchmark. Across the 338 institutions that have public data for the Learning Resources metric and the corresponding benchmark value, the median difference from benchmark is -0.8 %points, and the mean is -2.3 %points: in a symmetrical distribution, the median and mean would coincide. Of these institutions, 59% have metric values below the benchmark, and 38% below the lower materiality borderline. Furthermore, **smaller institutions like Buckingham tend to do less well** than large institutions on this metric: the Learning Resources metric is below the lower materiality borderline for 48% of institutions with less than 2000 students in the NSS target populations, including Buckingham. Within this context, we note that the difference from benchmark of -4.0 %points puts Buckingham 233rd out of 338 institutions (i.e. within the top 70% of institutions), and 139th out of the 230 institutions with fewer than 2000 students in the NSS target populations (within the top 60%).

2.4.4 It may also be relevant to refer back to 1.56, as, after carrying out a rank correlation analysis at institution level—by merging the ‘%HE Qualifications on entry’ data from the Size and Shape of Provision worksheet with the % Strongly Agree/Agree on Learning Resources from the Student Experience worksheet—we have observed there is a **statistically significant negative rank correlation** between these measures. In other words, where populations are more ‘postgraduate in time’ there is a tendency to be less satisfied with provision in this area. This would appear to apply to Buckingham.

2.4.5 Statistical analysis aside, smaller institutions making similar proportional investments in IT, Library and course-specific resources are seldom able to achieve the leverage and economies of scale available to budgets 10 or 15 times the size, and must work that much harder to ensure all groups of students engage with the resources that are available.⁴⁶ The University is committed to ensuring that this happens. In 2022 Library leadership changed hands, and the University’s Executive Group commissioned a root-and-branch external audit of the IT Services operating model. On the one hand, this

has led to a significant Quality Improvement Plan (codenamed 'Revolution in the Library') and on the other to the development of a significantly revised cross-campus IT Strategy, to be delivered by Q2 2023.

2.4.6 Key features of the QIP include

- Upgrading of the Library Catalogue and LMS to the **Enterprise Discovery Platform** and App
- Redesigning of the **social and learning spaces** of FCLP main library (look, layout, furniture & lighting) to enhance the user experience; increasing book self-checkout facilities
- [The above is part of a major £3.2 million **investment in Computing & AI** involving new learning resources such as dedicated labs for AI & Robotics, Cyber Security, Games development, and specialist equipment for the above areas. This has enabled and encompassed further developments in **teaching and collaborative social learning spaces** at the Verney Park campus, work which will enhance the student experience in all areas of FCLP, from Q2 2023 when the new Library facilities will open⁴⁷]
- Raising awareness of the multiple services provided by the Library; making Libraries key venues on campus, with their own **events programme**
- Introducing **Libguides** software, used widely across the University sector to provide targeted information resources for each course.

Other related initiatives include:

- Launch of a new **Digital Inter-Library Loan** request form and PowerApp for authorisations; the introduction of this has seen the university's volume of article requests return to pre-pandemic levels, which Library staff regard as an indication of strong uptake.⁴⁸
- Continuing **significant investment in Kortext**, post-pandemic (>£0.3m, 2020–22) to ensure every student has access to their own key e-book for every module studied.

2.4.7 Where significant 'cold spots' in split-indicator satisfaction have become evident, as with Economics and Medicine, School-based action plans have been implemented.

2.4.8 **Economics.** In 2019 a correlation was noted in the Department between a temporary increased deployment of visiting lecturers/use of short-term contracts and lower scores in module surveys and in NSS results for Q18–20. Further analysis suggested that the problem was not a lack of library or course-specific resources *per se*,⁴⁹ but rather that students were not being pointed effectively towards materials that were available and accessible and/or were being pointed to material that was not available/accessible at Buckingham. This correlation fed successful recruitment proposals for more permanent staff plus a programme re-design requiring the use of fewer VLs, and as a result between 2020 and 2022 Buckingham Economics NSS Q18–20 average scores improved significantly, with the 2022 survey showing a 100% satisfaction score for Q18, and an overall improvement of +20% for this scale.⁵⁰

2.4.9 **Medical School.** Over the last three years the Faculty has purposefully expanded the range of educational resources available to the students for both their learning and revision.⁵¹ To support learners, FHMS provides traditional learning resources on site as well as eLearning resources through a dedicated VLE.

Traditional. A key project for 2023 is the co-development of new informal learning space for medical and biomedical sciences students at the Crewe campus, along with provision of additional librarian support. The aim of the project is to redesign existing space to allow students to have a flexible space that will support engaging learning experiences, foster a sense of belonging, and promote strong Mental Health and wellbeing.

E-Learning. Other library resources are available through FMHS paying for associate **membership of the Royal Society of Medicine (RSM) for all its students and staff**, at an annual cost of over £35,000. This opens access to one of the finest physical and digital medical libraries in the world which includes a wide collection of books, journals, electronic journals, and online medical databases. Membership gives students access to benefits that go far beyond access to e-resources (careers & guidance; live events and webinars; prizes, funding and bursary opportunities; central library and accommodation facilities in London). The Faculty believes these outweigh the slight inconvenience involved in accessing e-materials via a separate portal.

Anatomy. Because of the complexity and difficulty of the topic, FMHS students have unlimited access to a full complement of Adam Rouilly models allowing students to build their understanding; each model has been linked to additional information which can be accessed through QR codes on the plinths. Students can also access state-of-the-art anatomical software, Complete Anatomy (annual cost £42,000) and Acland anatomy.

Portfolio Learning. Through our membership of the Undergraduate Medical Portfolio Consortium, FMHS has invested additional funds to create a bespoke e-Portfolio, to encourage the reflective practice necessary for a successful career in medicine.

Clinical skills spaces at Buckingham campus, Crewe Campus (from 2023), and placement hospital bases are designed to simulate a hospital ward; here using both hi- and low-fidelity simulators and healthcare resources students gain confidence and competency in their practical skills by performing clinical skills alongside trainers and peers.

Impact. NSS results for Medicine at Buckingham are only available from 2019 onwards, as the MBChB course commenced in 2015 and had no eligible respondents before 2019. The Medical School's scale averages for NSS Q18–20 between 2019 and 2022, compared against the undifferentiated (un-benchmarked) sector performance for Medicine, show what began as a substantial gap narrowing distinctly over this 4-year period.

Student Voice. MBChB students give feedback through structured questionnaires at the end of each Learning Unit in Phase I and each Block in Phase II. As part of this survey students were asked to record their level of agreement with the statement, 'I am able to access adequate educational resources'. The 2018 cohort (i.e. those who completed the NSS in 2022) agreed that there was access to adequate resources, with an average score for this question of 4.4 (SD 0.5, Median 4.5), across all the Blocks in all the clinical Placements in the final year with a response rate of 70%. This corresponds to an internally-derived and highly granular, satisfaction percentage of **85%**. FMHS is optimistic that annual improvements and continued substantial targeted investment in this area will improve student learning and bring NSS results broadly into line with benchmark within 18-24 months.

2.5 Student Voice

The benchmark for 'Student Voice' for the University of Buckingham is 69.6% and the observed NSS-based indicator was +4.1 %points above this, with 89.9% of the statistical uncertainty

distribution materially above the benchmark, suggesting the initial interpretation that this feature of student outcomes at the University of Buckingham offers strong statistical evidence of being 'outstanding quality'. During the period 2019–2022 we were also oriented by the aim of exceeding benchmark in the NSS assessment indicator in all relevant subjects by 2023 as one of its KPIs. We achieved this in all subjects.⁵²

- 2.5.1 As sections 2.1 through 2.4 have indicated, students at The University of Buckingham are furnished with regular, tailored opportunities to provide feedback on their programmes of study, and staff incorporate their opinions and views into their year-on-year change management and annual review processes, backed up by the availability of data-dashboards at module and programme level.
- 2.5.2 As our current *Learning and Teaching Strategy* states, 'the University seeks to create a dynamically responsive environment for teaching and learning where students feel comfortable and willing to voice their views without fear or favour, both formally and in informal contexts, [...] so will ensure that there are clear and visible means for students to see where and how their feedback has been acted on. This will include summaries of any specific changes made in response to student feedback in each iteration of a programme or module, as well as where action has not been taken.'⁵³
- 2.5.3 A key area of development and improvement during the period has been the embedding of Student Union (SU) involvement in the academic features of the student experience in order to embed a co-creative approach between students and staff.
- 2.5.4 In 2019 the University's SU researched, agreed, and began to follow an ambitious overhaul strategy for the period 2019–2023, which has borne fruit during the period under consideration. It was developed from the *NUS Strategic Plan Analysis* report (2018) and from detailed recommendations from an audit in 2019 commissioned from an external consultant with extensive experience working in SUs in different British HEIS, both as employee and sabbatical officer.
- 2.5.5 Prominent among resulting changes was the funding, hiring and training of a team of **Sabbatical Officers**.
Equally important were the steps taken from 2020 to organise the localised appointment of student representatives within what was formerly the School-based structure of the University into an SU-co-ordinated **Student Council**, meeting quarterly to a formal and minuted agenda, of some 25–30 Academic Representatives. A clear feedback loop to School Assessment Learning and Teaching committees (SALTs), and to Senate and the University Council has been instituted. In the words of the SU Manager presiding over this change, the intention was 'to give students confidence that they can speak openly and honestly to their SU about their academic experience'.
- 2.5.6 The SU Manager now meets weekly to discuss student matters with the managers of professional services departments of Wellbeing Skills and Diversity, Careers and Employability, Student Mentoring, Library Services, and ASK. The entire **Student Support Services** group is represented by its Director on the Executive Group, also meeting weekly.
- 2.5.7 Other relevant initiatives in this period include the partnering of the Buckingham SU with **UNITU**, the so-called 'student voice' platform, allowing students to raise academic queries 24/7 outside of formal channels.⁵⁴ The analytics show evidence of engagement from undergraduate students from each school within FCLP and FBHS during the period

(FMHS follows specific GMC guidelines for internal surveys covering non-academic as well as academic matters.)

3. STUDENT OUTCOMES

3.1 Continuation

The benchmark for the University of Buckingham is 91.9% and the observed indicator was 0.4% below, with 100% of the statistical uncertainty distribution broadly in line with the benchmark, suggesting the initial interpretation that this feature of student outcomes at the University of Buckingham offers compelling evidence of being 'very high quality'.

3.1.1 Medicine at the University of Buckingham, which accounts for 18% of the student numbers in the sample, is flagged as having a benchmark of 96.8% for this feature, with an observed split indicator of 97.7%,

Where a provider's benchmark for any split indicator is 95 per cent or higher, and the provider is not materially below its benchmark at institutional level, this can initially be taken as **compelling evidence of outstanding quality** for this group of students.⁵⁵

3.1.2 As part of its Admissions procedures, at an institutional level, the **University insists on 6.5 IELTS** or equivalent as the normal condition of admission for international undergraduate applicants; this is 0.5 higher than the sector norm.⁵⁶ This is in order to optimise the chances of successful outcomes for students for whom an undergraduate degree at Buckingham may be their first experience of British education or of teaching, learning and assessment in an English-speaking environment. It also recognises the challenge represented for these groups of students by the accelerated degree model.

3.1.3 Given the extent to which, since its inception, the university has been **responding in its teaching and curriculum to its diverse student body**, the TEF 2023 data does not point to significant BME attainment gaps of the kind identified by other universities.⁵⁷ For Continuation, Buckingham full-time undergraduates⁵⁸ performed broadly in line with or materially above benchmark for all of the following demographic split indicators: Age* / Disability / Ethnicity / Sex / ABCS* and Deprivation Quintiles / Domicile, and to strong/compelling degrees of statistical certainty. Here it may be seen, indeed, that, amongst those who are UK-domiciled, Black and Asian students perform marginally better than White.

3.1.4 Internally, quarterly continuation reports are produced which **systematically tabulate and aggregate non-continuation figures** produced at consistent census points through the year, so as to produce end-of-year forecasts. These are broken down by Department and discipline, but also by many of the 'split indicators' (for student characteristics) used in TEF 2023 indicators, and since 2021 have been prefaced by an analysis linked to the Senate-approved Continuation Action Plan of October 2019. The reports are circulated and discussed widely within the University, but also reviewed by University Council along with progress towards the Action Plan goals.

3.1.5 The academic workstream of the **Continuation Action Plan** involves 7 main projects, which in 2021 were reprioritised by Heads of School and University Executive Group in the following rank: **I** Student Dashboard and Information System (including Learning Analytics) (*currently on-boarding Phase 1 with chosen partner, JISC*); **II** Timetabled & templated 1-week induction for UG and PGT students (*Approved by Senate*;

commencing Jan 2024); **III** New Assessment and Teaching & Learning Strategies (*approved, November 2022*); **IV** Review of Academic Regulations (*1st draft of new combined UG and PGT regulations completed; out for consultation and approval Q3 2023*); **V** Tutorial enhancement programme (*project terms yet to be defined*); **VI** Harmonised/revised academic calendar for all four faculties (*preliminary scoping underway*); **VII** Diversified curriculum and assessment model (*Work completed 2022 through programme major and minor changes*). As can be seen 6 of the 7 are either underway or completed.

- 3.1.6 The **Student Dashboard and Information System** is major project with JISC as external partner, to allow students to view in a single screen a very wide variety of their own engagement data (gathered by consent) in relation to cohort trends, as well as key information regarding grades, feedback, timetable (including changes), programme and performance detail. It will also offer key permitted members of the University staff (personal tutors, mentors, WSD staff) access to individual engagement patterns, and programmer directors, Heads of Department, School etc. dashboard access to cohort level data: in other words, a comprehensive Learning Analytics functionality. The onboarding of Phase 1 has been underway since October 2022.

3.2 Completion

The benchmark for the University of Buckingham is 88.9% and the observed indicator was 2.2% below, with 66.4% of the statistical uncertainty distribution broadly in line with the benchmark, suggesting the initial interpretation that this feature of student outcomes at the University of Buckingham offers evidence of being ‘very high quality’.

- 3.2.1 A relatively high ‘own contribution to benchmark’ figure here of 23.1% should be noted for the overall indicator, as well as for 6 subject splits where the ‘own contribution to benchmark’ exceeds 20%, including for History (60.9%), Economics (50.1%) and Politics (61.5%). ‘Length of course’ seems to be the key differentiating benchmarking factor in play here, but as noted in 1.5.3, considerably more Buckingham students follow 2- or 2¼-year accelerated programmes than the official TEF datasets suggest (57% not 29%), which implies that ‘own contribution to benchmark’ figures could actually be even higher.
- 3.2.2 The above has implications. In the OfS-commissioned review of benchmarking methodologies,⁵⁹ no attempt is made to quantify numerically the point at which a provider’s own contribution to a particular benchmark constitutes an issue, but, generally, where a ‘provider’s own students [make] a substantial contribution to the calculation of its benchmark’ this is said to make ‘the calculation less robust and the resulting benchmark value less meaningful’.⁶⁰ Thus, we proceed cautiously, but agree with the review’s final position that ultimately ‘the performance of a benchmark depends on its outputs and how its users understand and engage with the results. Assessing this performance will depend on the extent to which a benchmark has impact e.g. how much it has helped to drive up standards’ (44). Nevertheless, we believe the extent of self-benchmarking in the institutional and split completion indicators draws attention to the fact that a very high proportion of our undergraduates complete their studies in significantly less time than students elsewhere.
- 3.2.3 Examination of the performance for different student groups is instructive:

- Medicine at the University of Buckingham, which accounts for 18% of the student numbers in the sample, is flagged as having a benchmark of 95.8% for this feature, with an observed split indicator of 94.5%, at 91.9% statistical certainty broadly in line with benchmark. Where a provider's benchmark for any split indicator is 95 per cent or higher, and the provider is not materially below its benchmark at institutional level, this can be taken as strong statistical evidence of **outstanding quality** for this group of students.⁶¹
- For five of the other subject splits, Completion is **broadly in line** with benchmark at reasonably strong certainty levels (57.5%–92.3%).
- Buckingham full-time undergraduates performed **broadly in line** with benchmark for all of the following demographic split indicators: Disability / Ethnicity / Sex / ABCS and Deprivation Quintiles / Domicile. Amongst those who are UK-domiciled, Black students outperform both White and Asian.

3.2.4 Strong completion rates are highly dependent on continuation rates and a bi-product of excellent academic and student support, so **much of 2.3 applies here**. Through its WSD department, the University offers expert Mental Health support, counselling and Positive Thinking therapies (including on-campus therapy dogs), a Faculty-based student mentoring service, advice on inclusivity and access, alcohol and substance guidance, and access to out-of-hours services. Faculty Mentors work hand-in-hand with Personal Tutors with students whose engagement is flagged; as numerous student accolades testify, their work is crucial in keeping students on track through to results day.⁶²

3.3 Progression

The benchmark for the University of Buckingham is 72.8% and the observed indicator was +6.4 %points higher, with 97.3% of the statistical uncertainty distribution materially above the benchmark, suggesting the initial interpretation that this feature of student outcomes at the University of Buckingham offers compelling evidence of 'outstanding quality'.

- 3.3.1 The progression measure is an interesting feature of TEF 2023 as being somewhat isolated in terms of detectable cause-and-effect relationships with other TEF measures.⁶³ Nevertheless, the University believes that the steps we have taken to **embed careers and employability skills, training, and reflective practices** across our undergraduate body in the last 5 years (see 1.2.2) have tangibly contributed to excellent progression results. Particularly strong split indicator scores may be noted for Black graduates, for graduates of English Studies (which at Buckingham include Digital News and Media) and for Psychology.
- 3.3.2 At Buckingham, **Careers, Employability and Alumni Relations (CEAR)** is a single unit sitting within Student Support Services, and interfacing throughout the year with students and alumni via a variety of channels.⁶⁴ The operation of the Careers and Employability Service and Alumni Relations Office under one manager enables close collaboration between these complementary functions, which share the aim of supporting graduate employability. CEAR also collaborates with academic Faculties to provide a wide range of embedded and extra-curricular employability activities.⁶⁵
- 3.3.3 **Engagement with Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies**
Part of our success is connected to the nature of the University's course portfolio. Conservatively, some 62% of the University's undergraduates study on programmes accredited and in some instances directly regulated by PSRBs. The experience of

students of Accounting and Finance, Computing, Law, Medicine, and Psychology is enhanced and given professional rigour through our engagement with PSRBs. The relevant Schools value their relationship with these bodies both as a guarantor of high standards and as a way for students to gain access to professional networks and opportunities. Hence accreditation reports and statements of findings following visits and inspections are of considerable value as external measures of quality:

- The GMC's *Annual Quality Assurance Summary 2021–22* singled out for commendation the Medical School's methods for ensuring marking consistency in OSCE examinations (April 2022, p. 7)
- In its reaccreditation Visit Report, the British Computer Society panel commended the School's 'approach to supporting the students [... and] was particularly impressed by the care taken by the School to understand students' prior achievement and facilitate entry at an appropriate point into the programme'; also by the 'care taken to deliver customised support at an individual level' (2019, p. 2)
- In its most recent visit report, the British Psychological Society panel commended the 'tutorial system' as 'highly beneficial to students in supporting their learning; particularly in explicitly developing students' critical thinking skills [...] the frequency and quality of contact time between students and staff is commendable [...] the commitment [of the team] to enhancement was clearly evident [...] the engagement and assessment of ethics ...is exemplary. Student are supported in developing both transferable skills and valuable personal characteristics' (2017–2022/23, p. 2)

3.3.4 Excellent progression data is supported within some of the more **reflective questions of the GO survey**. When asked to rate the statement 'My current activity is meaningful', **53%** of Buckingham graduate respondents strongly agreed and **39%** agreed (92%), versus 41% and 45% respectively (86%) in the sector as a whole. When asked whether 'My current activity fits with my future plans', the results were **48%** / **37%** (versus 37% / 40% for the sector). And to the statement 'I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity', **40%** of Buckingham respondents strongly agreed, and **40%** agreed (versus 30% and 41% in the sector as a whole). Across these three questions, our graduates respond more positively compared with the sector as a whole by +6 %points, +8 %points and +9 %points.

3.3.5 The University's ongoing approach to supporting students into fulfilling careers is encapsulated in its *Careers and Employability Strategy*, where the current focus (for 2021–2023) comprises the following six pillars:

- i. Improving our access to and use of data to provide more targeted support for students and recent graduates.
- ii. Complete the process of embedding professional skills modules into undergraduate degrees across FBHS and FCLP to boost the employability of our graduates.⁶⁶
- iii. Being highly visible and accessible, to ensure students and graduates are aware of the C&E support available to them and have every opportunity to engage.
- iv. Providing funded and flexible paid work placements/projects helping more students to gain meaningful work experience.
- v. Capitalising on the closeness of our Careers and Alumni teams to deliver mutually beneficial initiatives.
- vi. Using digital services to add scale/ efficiency to supplement f2f capacity.

- 3.3.6 The impact of these objectives is carefully measured and reported on through quarterly Student Engagement summaries circulated to Faculty and School management teams.
- 3.3.7 Every discipline, large or small, runs its own targeted careers events involving industry professionals and successful alumni.⁶⁷
- 3.3.8 Of particular note in 2021–2022 was the introduction via funding from the University’s Enterprise and Innovation Unit of paid micro-internships in local SMEs, a scheme known as **B-Enterprising**. interns were placed during Year 1 of the project, with 100% stating they would recommend the scheme to a friend, 69% learning soft skills such as time management, communication and networking and 65% developed technical skills such as learning to use new software, and how to clean and manipulate data.⁶⁸ 100% of employers stated they’d recommend the scheme to another business.

3.4 Educational Gain / Learning Gain

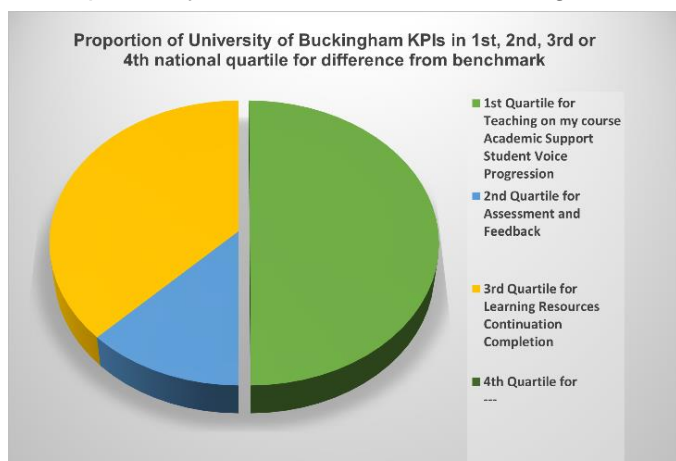
- 3.4.1 The educational gains the University intends for its students are captured in rich conceptual detail in the intended learning outcomes (ILO) sections of the university’s programme specifications and in even greater granularity in module ‘ILOs’. These are systematically subdivided into ‘Knowledge and Understanding’ ‘Cognitive (thinking) Skills’ and ‘Transferable/Practical Skills’, and mapped to the learning, teaching and assessment strategies designed to allow students to demonstrate these have been achieved. Marking guides and grade descriptors shared with students then allow them, markers, moderators and verifiers, to assess the level and classification at which these have been achieved and to award/be awarded marks accordingly. External examiners are invited to confirm every semester that ILOs are being achieved in students’ work, and teaching teams fine-tune their practice in response. Module and programme specifications themselves are based on reference to successive revisions to the relevant subject benchmark statements for the discipline. It would be hard to conceive of a more **systemic way of articulating the gains our students are intended to achieve**. Our three academic strategies for 2023–27 (see 1.4.1) set out our ambitions for maximising the opportunity for all students to reach their potential within these frameworks.
- 3.4.2 This points forward with a certain inevitability to the aggregation of module-level measures of students’ performance into the output-measure of educational gain that is represented by degree classification—and it is precisely here that difficulties emerge, given the national picture with degree classifications over time that is analysed in various key OfS publications.⁷⁰
- 3.4.3 Over time, however, it may be seen that the University’s degrees have **‘held their value’** to a greater extent than elsewhere,⁷¹ and in this respect permits the University to have confidence that our degree results speak for themselves in terms of expressions of educational gain. Very strong progression results (3.3) support the hypothesis that employers find Buckingham graduates to possess the requisite knowledge and skillset to which their degree results attest.
- 3.4.4 This means we have limited confidence in what could appear to be an important measure of educational gain, namely the ‘Value Added’/VA score presented in the *Guardian University League Table*.⁷² The methodology rewards a provider with a higher VA score if its students, at any given entry qualification level, achieve ‘good degrees’ at higher rates than the sector average. Students with ‘vague entry qualifications’, of which Buckingham, with its very high population of non-UK-domiciled students, has many, are

treated as though they have the sector average entry level qualification for their subject area, with unquantifiable effects on the resulting VA score.⁷³ We have a strong suspicion that *Guardian* VA and OfS 'Z' scores are in effect measuring the same thing, assuming it a positive on the one hand and an index of possible grade inflation on the other.

- 3.4.5 We have, however, already outlined that most of the University's undergraduates achieve their gains following a significantly shorter Length of Course than elsewhere, indicating that their **learning gain follows a steeper line** when plotted against time. In common parlance this is sometimes referred to as a 'learning curve', or (when observed in final year/semester results) as 'exit velocity'. The University has thus become interested in tracking whether the line of cohort performance (based on grades awarded) follows a **linear or exponential path** plotted against level of module difficulty (L4, 5 and 6 as mapped against our internal sequence of Prelim, Part 1, P2S1 and P2S2)—on the basis that if it is the latter, there has been demonstrable **learning gain** that could fairly be attributed to the collaboration of student and provider in accelerating performance through their learning journey, above what could reasonably be expected.
- 3.4.6 Our 'Internal Value Added Aggregate' tracker for the University as a whole shows that: for all 27 entry points , between January 2011 and January 2021, mean marks at Part 1 (L4 and L5), Part 2 Stage 1 (L5 and L6) and Part 2 Stage 2 (L6) **increased between every semester**—in spite of the mounting level of challenge and stretch the increase in level signified—and for 15 cohorts, the overall increase was half a degree classification or more.⁷⁴
- 3.4.7 At programme level, this type of learning gain is less frequent but more pronounced. Across no fewer than 996 year/entry point/programme combinations 2011–21 (including for tiny cohorts), and **across all Schools with UG module results**, 327 result sets (34%) show stepped improvement across all 3 semesters, and of these, 40% show stepped improvement of > half a degree class, and 32% improvement of ≥ a whole degree class.
- 3.4.8 Nevertheless, given the importance of getting this right, the University believes that **further work** will be needed to establish robust practice—preferably replicable across multiple student groups and providers—for measuring and **evidencing educational gains in any more sophisticated and compelling manner than we do already**. And to the extent that definitions of educational gain need to embrace soft skills and behavioural and affective dimensions of learning, then measurement may need to embrace qualitative and more experiential reflections on this: gathered nationally either 'in real-time' via NSS questions or retrospectively via additional, reflective 'graduate perceptions' questions in the GO survey.

3.5 Summary table

- 3.5.1 In terms of national 'difference from benchmark' rankings drawn from the relevant datasets and divided into quartiles,⁷⁵ the University of Buckingham as 4 x 1st quartile results, 1 x 2nd Quartile, 3 x 3rd Quartile, and no bottom Quartile positions. **Ends.**



4. REFERENCES

All **internally published references** are available via Sharepoint: access on request.

- ¹ Figures 'Higher education in numbers' (UUK, 20/12/2022) at <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/latest/insights-and-analysis/higher-education-numbers> [accessed 5/10/2022].
- ² Source: 'Teaching Excellence Framework: Year two. Statement of Findings. The University of Buckingham' (June 2017). [TEF outcomes - Office for Students](#) [accessed 19/10/2022].
- ³ Outcomes for the TEF 2nd Subject-level pilot (2018–19) supplied to providers i.e. not published. Source 'TEF Statement of Findings', p. 1; held locally [TEF Provider and Student Submission - 10007787 The University of Buckingham.pdf - All Documents \(sharepoint.com\)](#).
- ⁴ See [University of Buckingham \(qaa.ac.uk\)](#) [accessed 15/10/2022], *Higher Education Review* (18/10/2018), p. 3.
- ⁵ See [University of Buckingham \(qaa.ac.uk\)](#) [accessed 15/10/2022], *Review for Specific Course Designation* (31/01/2019). Good practice (paras 4–6): 'providing a comprehensive and sustained approach to personalised support for learning, including small-sized tutorial groups ...continu[ing] to embed innovative pathways into higher education through its Foundation Programme ... continu[ing] to develop its Positive University initiative to promote and support the welfare of students and staff through a wide range of inter-related activities'.
- ⁷ Following the appointment of the current Vice Chancellor and (Dec 2022) a new Chair of Council, the *Strategy* has been under development across the University since 2021. It is set to be approved by Council in April 2023, and will be publicly available.
- ⁸ Approved by the University Senate, 13/11/2022. Internally published at <https://uniofbuck.sharepoint.com/sites/SPO-PS-STF/SitePages/University-Policies-and-Procedures.aspx>
- ⁹ E.g., The University of Buckingham has been ranked 1st or 1st= in the NSS in 2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2015 and 2016 and 2nd in 2007, 2011, 2013 and 2014. In 2016, the University was *The Times/Sunday Times* University of the Year for Teaching Quality and was also ranked first for graduate employability (98.1%; HESA data, July 2016) and Campus Safety (*Complete University Guide*, 2016).
- ¹⁰ While research in this area has focused historically on primary, pre-primary and secondary/high school education, and recent studies suggest increased complexity in contributory factors as well as interpretation of data, nevertheless few call into question the basic premise of summer learning loss; see Kuhfeld, M. (2019). 'Surprising new evidence on summer learning loss.' *Phi Delta Kappan*, 101(1), 25–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721719871560>.
- ¹¹ See 'Potential Benefits to Accelerated Degrees', pp. 7–8 of Pollard *et al.*, *Accelerated degrees in Higher Education. Literature review* (IES for the Department of Education, March 2017). [Accelerated degrees in Higher Education \(ioe.ac.uk\)](#) [accessed 17/10/2022].
- ¹² See the 'Fee breakdown' tab at [Fees and Finance Information | University of Buckingham](#) [accessed 13/10/2022].
- ¹³ FMHS students follow the same daily format of lecture followed by group work looking at related clinical cases and workbook tasks. Small groups are selected by Belbin indicators to create a diversity and maintained at no more than 10 people. The students remain in these groups for 2 years working with junior doctor facilitators who act as near-peer tutors.
- ¹⁴ Faculties are not currently required to report this data on a systematic basis but a sample of existing analysis from FCLP corroborates: modules taught in the Schools of Law, Computing and Psychology in 2022 deployed assistants other than the module subject leader(s) to run tutorials on only 4%, 4% and 18% of modules, respectively.
- ¹⁵ See [Fees and Finance Information | University of Buckingham](#) [accessed 15/10/2022].
- ¹⁶ See [The University of Buckingham - StepEx](#) [accessed 3/11/2022].

- ¹⁷ Based on the file 'Size_and_shape_all_providers.csv' online at <https://officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/size-and-shape-of-provision-data-dashboard/get-the-data/> [accessed 17/11/2022]. Filtered as follows: col A All; col B Agg; col C All students; col D Qualifications on entry; col E HE-level qualifications; col F—FT UG >1000; col G ranked in descending order of %.
- ¹⁸ By way of internal comparison/corroborator of this data, of 2244 UG students analysed between 2019–2022, 296 had either a UK First Degree or Non-UK First Degree (13%).
- ¹⁹ See <https://www.buckingham.ac.uk/international-trade-economics>.
- ²⁰ Extract from Q27 'Quality of training overall'; internal survey for Cohort 1 apprentices conducted by University of Buckingham (Summer 2022; 85% completion rate from 34 eligible respondents); copies accessible here: [Apprenticeship End of Course and Day 8 and 9 Training Days Survey.docx \(sharepoint.com\)](#).
- ²¹ Economics (UoA16) approved to submit under [Economic] History (UoA 28); exceptions approved, due to low *fte* numbers of staff with significant responsibility for research, for Education (UoA 23) and Modern Languages (UoA 26).
- ²² 77 out of 164 academic staff members were designated as having Significant Research Responsibility (SSR) under the University's approved *Code of Practice* for REF2021, giving a research intensity of 47%. In terms of the ranking presented by the *Complete University Guide 2023*, this score would have placed the University of Buckingham 57= out of 128 listed HEIs, i.e. in the top 50% for this measure. See [Unaffiliated Rankings Research intensity 2023 \(thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk\)](#) [accessed 19/11/2022].
- ²³ See [Online Teaching and Learning Survey RESULTS.pdf](#) [accessed 19/11/2022].
- ²⁴ For national figures, see 'Agreement Rates for all Covid Questions', online at (<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-information-and-data/national-student-survey-nss/nss-data-2021-covid-19-questions/>) [accessed 28/10/2022]; for The University of Buckingham figures, see [SPO Professional Services Site - National Student Survey 2021 Complete Results.pdf - All Documents \(sharepoint.com\)](#), p. 87 (NB designated as 'not for distribution outside of institution'; made available under permission).
- ²⁵ The *PTES 2022* indicated levels of satisfaction +2.3% above the 'small & specialist' institutional benchmark in the Pandemic Response area while for the *PRES 2022*, these figures were +19.8% above the 'small & specialist benchmark' and +18.5% above the Global Benchmark for support during the Covid-19 pandemic (including results +23/+21% above the global/small & specialist benchmarks for the question 'my institution has worked to ensure the quality of my academic experience during the Covid-19 pandemic'). Source: *University of Buckingham PTES 2022 Global Rankings* (AdvanceHE, 2022), p. 44 and *University of Buckingham PRES 2022 Global Rankings* (AdvanceHE, 2022), pp. 14–15, 28–29.
- ²⁶ *Op. cit.*, reference 5.
- ²⁷ Business & Management, English Studies, Economics, and Medicine: all broadly in line with individual benchmarks; Computing, Law, Politics and Psychology all Materially Above; History/Art History and MFL [low] data i.e. not recorded. Aim set out in The University's 'Academic and Student Experience Strategy, 2019–22', a working document underpinning a series of Senate-approved Action Plans; unpublished, held in Sharepoint [Strategy Documents, Approved and Working](#) [accessed 23/11/2022].
- ²⁸ In 2019 the University's module surveys were conducted via the EvaSys platform and aggregated from all departments in what are now FBHS and FCLP (i.e. all modules in all UG subjects apart from Medicine, were surveyed). The results presented here were for 10,821 eligible respondents (individual students being asked to complete 9–12 module surveys each, depending on their programme structure), from which 6,878 surveys were returned,

- giving a response rate of 71%. In 2019, section 1 of the module surveys covered 'Teaching and Assessment' hence data also employed in Section 2.2.
- ²⁹ Following the Faculty restructure (see 1.3) the University rationalised/upgraded its student survey platform and currently uses Explorance Blue for its institutional surveys. The figure here represents the weighted average for NSS Q1–4 for FCLP and FBHS, based on a survey of all 1st-year students (only) on all programmes in FBHS and FCLP (i.e. all programmes in all UG subjects apart from Medicine, were surveyed). The results presented here were for 238 eligible respondents, of whom 60 individuals responded regarding the totality of their programme (9–12 modules), giving an overall response rate of 25.2%.
- ³⁰ Accessible to SU and staff via [SPO Professional Services Site - Student Feedback - All Documents \(sharepoint.com\)](#) [accessed 6/1/2023].
- ³¹ [7.1-External-Examiner-Code-of-Practice.pdf \(buckingham.ac.uk\)](#) [accessed 24/10/2022].
- ³² <http://bear.buckingham.ac.uk/information.html> [accessed 12/12/2022]. The University's overall pool of 163 outputs was carefully audited by external peer consultants in each UoA, returning an overall average star rating of 2.8*. The REF 2021 requirement that even the smallest UoAs by *fte* submit a minimum of 2 impact case studies meant 18 case studies were prepared, all involving topics and projects relevant to UG curricula in those areas.
- ³³ *Op. cit.*, ref. 8.
- ³⁴ English Studies, Law, Politics and Psychology: all Materially Above their individual benchmarks; Business and Management, Medicine: broadly in line with individual benchmark; Computing, Economics: Below; History, Art History and MFL: [low] data.
- ³⁵ See ref. 28 above.
- ³⁶ See ref. 29 above. Figure represents weighted average for NSS Q-11 for FCLP and FBHS.
- ³⁷ J. Neves, A. Brown, *Student Academic Experience Survey 2022* (AdvanceHE & HEPI, 2022), p. 25. [2022 Student Academic Experience Survey - HEPI](#) [accessed 25/11/2022].
- ³⁸ *Op. cit.*, ref. 8.
- ³⁹ All subjects exceeded their individual benchmarks, with Business and Management, Computing, Economics, Politics and Psychology all Materially Above.
- ⁴⁰ Quarterly and annual reports internally published at [ASK](#) [accessed 15/12/2022].
- ⁴¹ See <https://www.rlf.org.uk/education/rlf-fellowshipscheme> [accessed 15/12/2022].
- ⁴² Survey conducted annually 2019–21; 330 eligible respondents; 53 responses (40 UG): response rate = 16%. 94% felt 'the support sessions were helpful', 72% felt they definitely 'helped their academic performance', 87% that they definitely or maybe (13%) 'helped with personal well-being and self-confidence'. 98% would definitely 'recommend the support sessions', and 98% ditto the screening sessions, to other students.
- ⁴³ Flagging of performance is based on sampling error considerations with the flag for 'significantly above/below benchmark' set at three standard errors, corresponding to a confidence level of almost 99.9% (i.e. very high). For Buckingham, the standard error on the Learning Resources metric (overall) is just over 2 percentage points, so three standard errors requires a difference from benchmark of +/-6 % points for flagging.
- ⁴⁴ See paras 9-13 of the supplementary document *Materiality and high benchmark values for use in interpretation of the TEF indicators* (OfS 09.2022, 26/1/2022), online at <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/materiality-and-high-benchmark-values-for-use-in-interpretation-of-the-tef-indicators/>. Para. 12c continues 'It would be desirable for a reasonable proportion of providers to have indicators broadly in line with benchmark, to aid the identification of very high-quality features. Given the distribution of performance across the sector, we would typically expect this proportion to be at least as great as the proportion that are materially above (or materially below) benchmark. *If fewer providers are broadly in*

line with benchmark than materially above (or materially below) benchmark, this could suggest that the materiality value is too low' (our italics).

- ⁴⁵ *Op. cit.*, ref. 44. Table 1d. Accessed 3/11/2022.
- ⁴⁶ Pressures on Library budgets globally as a result of publishers' 'big deal' tactics for subscription packages, and on small universities in particular, are clearly outlined in Timothy J. Tillack, 'Pressures, opportunities and costs facing research library acquisitions budgets: an Australian perspective,' *Australian Library Journal*, 63:3 (2014), 206–219. DOI: 10.1080/00049670.2014.915498 [accessed 11/12/2022].
- ⁴⁷ See [University of Buckingham launches AI and Innovation hub | University of Buckingham](#) for press release [accessed 15/11/2022].
- ⁴⁸ Data from 'ILLs annual analysis 2015–2022'; unpublished spreadsheet maintained in Library Services document management system [accessed 15/12/2022].
- ⁴⁹ 'EBSCO is our "go-to" journal database. With 472 Economics Journals and 255 Business, 74 Economic History, our students have access to all the key peer-reviewed Economics Journals. ...We have also recently constructed a dedicated reference library in the Vinson Centre for the Public Understanding of Economics and Entrepreneurship with a dedicated collection called the "Hayek library".' Source: [Economics – Report on Learning Resources Metric .docx](#). Unpublished, Economics & IS Dept, December 2022.
- ⁵⁰ Source: *National Student Survey Complete Results 2019–2022* [SPO Professional Services Site - National Student Survey \(NSS\) - All Documents \(sharepoint.com\)](#) [access 3/12/2022].
- ⁵¹ In 2022 the medical school spent over £150,000+ VAT on additional anatomical models and clinical skills resources. Source: FMHS internal report, unpublished.
- ⁵² Individual benchmarks exceeded in all subjects for which data reported, and Materially Above for Business & Management; Computing; Politics; and Psychology. The formalisation of the Academic and Student Experience working strategy referred to here was interrupted by the outbreak of the Pandemic; nevertheless important strands of it (e.g. the 56-point 'Continuation Action Plan') were approved by Senate in 2019, underpinning the work of the newly-formed Faculties from 2020 onwards (e.g. systematic establishment of NSS Quality Improvement Plans [QIPs] from 2021 onwards). On Faculty restructure, see Section 1.3.
- ⁵³ *Op cit.*, note 12. See Section 13 (p. 12).
- ⁵⁴ See [Unitu - The Student Voice Platform](#) [accessed 27/11/2022].
- ⁵⁵ *Regulatory advice 22*, para. 253, p. 66.
- ⁵⁶ See <https://www.buckingham.ac.uk/international/english-language-requirements/undergraduate-language-requirements/>. For sector norm, see [IELTS requirements for applying to a UK university | UKuni](#) [accessed 12/12/2022].
- ⁵⁷ See case study at <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/effective-practice/case-study-kingston-university> [accessed 13/11/2022] and pilot guidance (e.g. [Using the Value Added Score to challenge the BME attainment gap – BME Attainment Gap \(closingtheattainmentgap.co.uk\)](#) [access 13/11/2022]. The University follows AdvanceHE in use of BME rather than BAME, acknowledging both have limitations. [Use of language: race and ethnicity | Advance HE \(advance-he.ac.uk\)](#) [access 9/12/2022].
- ⁵⁸ The same is true for Buckingham's small number of part-time student (all students of Law), except that performance across the board is materially above benchmark for all demographic sub-indicators where data is available, with the exception of ABCS quintiles 4 or 5.
- ⁵⁹ *Review of benchmarking methodologies* (Alma Economics for the OfS, August 2018), p. 44.
- ⁶⁰ *Supporting information about constructing student outcome and experience indicators for use in OfS regulation. Description of statistical methods* (OfS, Jan 2022), p. 11. See

- <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/4893125c-6206-4359-8f73-90195161619c/description-of-statistical-methods-for-indicators.pdf> [access 20/12/2022].
- 61 *Regulatory advice* 22, para. 253, p. 66.
- 62 See internally published [Accolades, Testimonials \(sharepoint.com\)](#) and dashboard of available WSD services. [Accessed 19/12/2022].
- 63 For the sector as a whole, the progression measure has no statistically significant correlation with any of the other current TEF measures.
- 64 [Careers and Employability Service | University of Buckingham](#), [Careers And Employability \(buckingham.ac.uk\)](#) ; [University of Buckingham - Horizons](#) [access 3/1/2023].
- 65 [Careers Service offer to Faculties.xlsx \(sharepoint.com\)](#), internally published interactive spreadsheet recording Faculty interaction with a wide range of internal and external employability activities [accessed 07/01/2022].
- 66 CEAR developed a comprehensive 'professional skills' framework (2020) which, translated into a 'Professional Development Portfolio' is embedded in UG provision in FCLP and FBHS.
- 67 E.g. in collaboration with CEAR, Art History runs an annual 'Careers in the Art Market' forum (2015–2019); the English & Digital News dept. followed suit and ran 'Careers in Media, Publishing, Teaching and Research' f2f in (2019), online in 2020. See [Careers in Media, Publishing, Teaching and Research \(buckingham.ac.uk\)](#) [accessed 18/11/2022] for sample.
- 68 Source: The B-enterprising Entrepreneurial Project, end-of-year project report to The University of Buckingham Foundation Trustees. Available from BEIU. See also <https://bbf.uk.com/news/fully-funded-internship-scheme-launched> [accessed 29/11/2022].
- 70 In particular [Analysis of degree classifications over time: Changes in graduate attainment from 2010–11 to 2020–21 - Office for Students](#) Annex [access 22/12/2022].
- 71 In only 3 of the 10 years for which data was analysed was Buckingham's Z-score greater than +/-3.58 (whereby the difference is considered statistically significant): 2017–18 (+3.8), 2019–20 (+4.4), and 2020–21 (+4.6). See *Analysis of Degree Classifications over time*, pp. 18–19 and Annex A. When a provider ranking of z scores against sector for each of the years 2017–18 to 2020–21 is prepared, based on Annex A, Table 1 (1st place representing lowest variation and 144 the highest), the University ranks 62nd, 44th, 40th and 48th. The median number of years 2010–21 for which providers had high/statistically significant Z scores is 6 (143 institutions); for Buckingham it is 4.
- 72 The University doesn't feature in the main ranking for this league table, as we have insufficient student numbers to give the University data in ≥ 8 subject areas: the key criterion for inclusion. Individual subject tables feature us. On 8 occasions between 2020 and 2023, Accounting & Finance, Law, Psychology, Economics and English Studies have all featured with VA scores of $>5/10$ putting them in the top 10%–60% of these rankings. On 9 occasions departments have featured with scores putting them in the lower 40% of the rankings.
- 73 See 'Value Added' in [Methodology behind the Guardian University Guide 2022 | Universities | The Guardian](#) [accessed 22/11/2023].
- 74 i.e. where difference between Part 1 average grade results and P2S2 is ≥ 5 . Internal report [University and Department Value Added Aggregate 2011–2021.xlsx](#) available in Registry Document Manager [accessed 12/1/2023]. Tracked also by degree programme; further work underway on analysis at student characteristic level.
- 75 **STUDENT EXPERIENCE: Teaching on my course**—41st/303 institutions with full datasets for all SE metrics (1st Quartile); **Assessment and feedback**—96th/303 (2nd Q); **Academic Support**—40th= (1st Q); **Learning Resources**—210th/303 (3rd Q); **Student Voice**—55th/303 (1st Q); **STUDENT OUTCOMES: Continuation**—202nd/360 institutions with data for this metric (3rd Q); **Completion**—240th/342 institutions with data for this metric (3rd Q); **Progression**—38th/331 institutions with data for this metric (1st Q).