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1   Provider Context

Founded in 1827 as a mechanics' institute, the University of Wolverhampton operates from three main campuses in Wolverhampton, Walsall and Telford, plus the Springfield specialist campus for the built environment (in the City of Wolverhampton). Together, these campuses create a strong regional footprint. The geographic spread of our campuses means that 82% of our students are recruited from within a 25-mile radius of the University and live at home and commute to study, a reality that the size and shape dashboard is unable to capture.

1.1   Our Students

We have more than 21,000 students, the majority of whom study on undergraduate degrees on a full-time basis. Whilst international student numbers have grown significantly in recent years, our provision is primarily designed to meet the demand for graduate skills within our region. Hence, around one third of our undergraduate students are on subjects allied to medicine, training to become nurses and allied health professionals within the region.
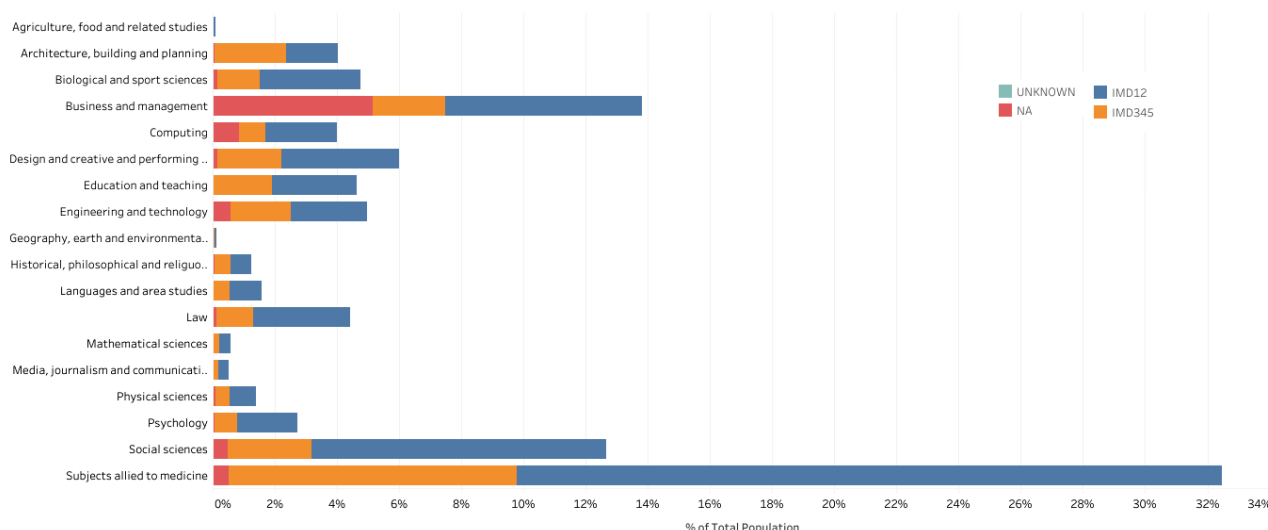
IMD profile of University of Wolverhampton students by CAH1, 2020/21

We are proud of the role that we play in improving the life chances of the people in our region, and of our record in supporting the least socially-mobile into higher education. Relative to other universities, more of our students are recruited from the region – particularly our sub-region, the Black Country – and they remain here upon graduation: 70.5% of our graduates remain within the West Midlands, predominantly in the Black Country. Their lives are intimately entwined with our region, which is currently one of the most challenged in the country. The Black Country has:

- amongst the lowest proportion of total jobs relative to the working age population (with a density of 0.66, versus a national average of 0.85[1])
- one of the highest proportions of the population who are unemployed (5.6%, versus a national average of 3.7%[2])
- fewer graduate level jobs (16% less highly skilled employment opportunities – 43% compared to 51% nationally)
- average salaries that are lower than the West Midlands and national averages (15% less than the national average at £34,121 compared to £40,010 nationally, and £36,855 for the West Midlands[3])
- a low qualification base, which is below regional and national averages (9.9% versus 6.6% nationally with no qualifications[4]).

In addition, Wolverhampton has the fifth highest level of secondary school pupils eligible for free school meals, and Walsall the ninth highest[5]. In the summer of 2022, the West Midlands had 5.8% of GCSE grades at 9, compared to 6.8% in England overall[6].

Our student population reflects the diversity that can be found within the West Midlands, and the Black Country. We are consistently above KPIs and the sector average in the intake of students from low socio-economic (IMD 1 and 2) backgrounds, and for students from low participation neighbourhoods, with 72.1% of our student population coming from IMD quintiles 1 and 2, over 50% of these from IMD 1. Figures for part-time students are similar to the full-time students, with the largest proportion of students coming from IMD 1 backgrounds, and 20.4% of new entrants coming from under-represented neighbourhoods, compared to 11.2% nationally (POLAR 4). We have consistently performed above our LPN (POLAR) target in our access agreements.
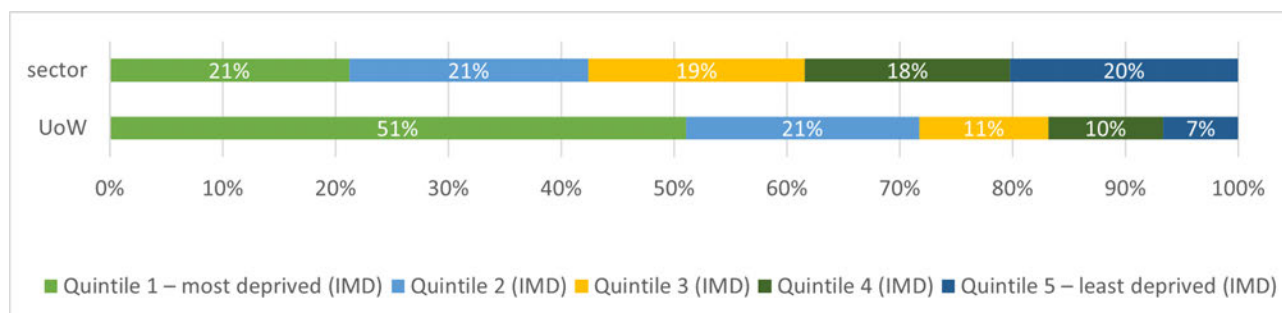
IMD profile of entrants to the University of Wolverhampton and the sector, 2020/21

Reflective of the demographics of the Black Country, we have a strong track record of recruitment of Global Majority[7] students, outperforming the sector and our KPIs to consistently have a near even split of white to Global Majority students (46% of our students are Global Majority). We recognise the additional barriers faced by Black students in our Access and Participation Plan (APP) and are making progress against our targets to increase their access to the University and their success during their studies, as reported in our monitoring return (approved August 2021). In 2020, we were awarded a Race Equality Charter Bronze Award and we also hold a Bronze Athena Swan Charter award. In 2022, we ratified a Disability Equality Action Plan (DEAP), committing us to addressing inclusivity for disabled staff and students in the strategic way the sector addresses gender and ethnicity.
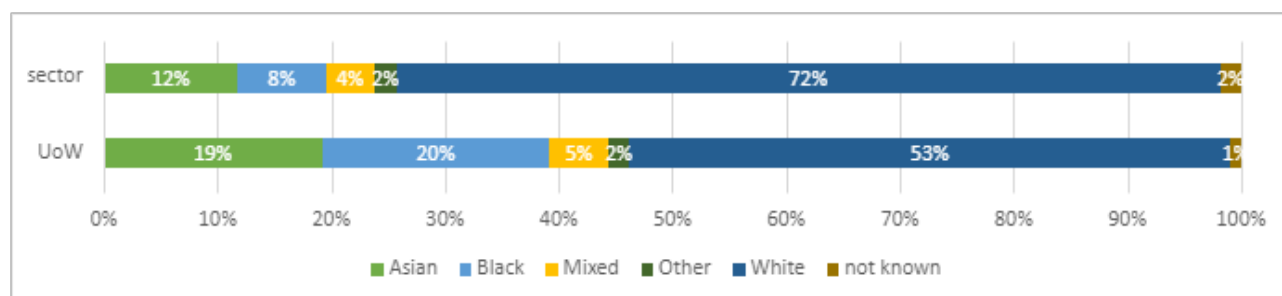
Ethnicity profile of UoW entrants compared to the sector, 2020/21[8]

Over the four academic years in scope for this TEF exercise, we have consistently seen high numbers of mature students enrolling to study, and on average each year they make up 46% of our full-time student population. This contrasts strongly against the sector average over this period of 27%. We also have higher proportions of mature students on our part-time courses, with just 10.1% of entrants in 2020/21 being under 21, compared to a sector figure of 15.2%.

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We are a founding member of the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers and we signed up to the Care Leaver Covenant in October 2019[9]. We consistently have one of the highest proportions and largest numbers of care experienced and estranged students. We currently have 171 students stating they were a care leaver at the point of enrolment. We are also proud to have signed the Stand Alone Pledge in 2016 and to be recognised for our ongoing support for estranged students in the 2020 Stand Alone Pledge Awards. There are currently 416 students who were 25 or under when they enrolled and who stated they were estranged at the point of enrolment.

Much research has been undertaken to identify the barriers to entry and success for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These barriers impact students' experience of university, their ability to continue on and complete their courses, their degree outcomes, and their employment prospects. The diversity of our student profile means that our students typically experience multiple dimensions of disadvantage, more so than their contemporaries in many other universities. Dealing with just one factor (such as caring responsibilities, part-time work or economic disadvantage) may be difficult, but when combined they pose even greater challenges to continuation, completion and employment outcomes. The multiplier effect cannot be reflected in benchmarking but our experience of supporting our students through their studies means we see this impacting them in very real ways. For example, this increases the likelihood of having significant responsibilities alongside their studies, which can affect their attendance or necessitate several breaks from study.

Our graduates often do not have the choice to move to more prosperous regions after graduation. As illustrated in the Kollydas and Green report[10], graduate mobility is influenced by graduates' characteristics, with high achieving graduates of Russell Group universities more likely to move away from their region of study than their peers at universities like Wolverhampton, and older graduates more likely to remain in their region of study than younger graduates. As Office for Students (OfS) research has identified, those who do not move to areas with higher levels of well-paid graduate jobs have fewer opportunities[11]. Our regional context, therefore, very much sets the frame for our students' and graduates' outcomes.

1.2   Our Mission and Strategy

The University is an anchor institution for (and of) the Black Country and wider West Midlands, a region that has suffered disproportionately from industrial restructuring. Throughout our history, we have consistently committed to offering students from all backgrounds an excellent learning experience and delivering skills to strengthen the economy. Our advanced facilities, applied research profile, and strong business engagement are all contributing factors to our position as a significant strategic force in the educational, cultural, and economic development of the Black Country and wider West Midlands. As the most recent Knowledge Exchange Framework data show, we are in the top quintile nationally for public and community engagement and for local growth and regeneration[12].

Our strategy, *Vision 2030*, aims to transform the leadership and workforce of our Place through inclusive student success and world-class research. Over the last few years, we have positioned ourselves as the University of Opportunity, delivering higher education at the point of need and believing in those who believe in themselves by offering them flexible routes into and through higher education. Our success in widening participation is evidenced by the diversity of our student population: this diversity has shaped our approaches to learning, teaching and support which recognise the complexity of our students' lives and the barriers they encounter, both internal and external to the University.

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Building on the progress made in our previous Strategic Plan in extending access and in improving satisfaction levels for our students, our focus for the remainder of this decade is to ensure excellent and equitable outcomes for all who study with us. This commitment will ensure that we focus not just on who is participating but more on how they achieve and on reducing gaps between different groups of students. In developing our approach, we are guided by the social and affirmation models of outcome evaluated through Theory of Change methodologies and so are constantly adapting the way we work to suit the individual needs of our students. We are committed to ensuring that the support available to our students is effective in enabling them to continue in and complete their studies, achieve a good honours degree and progress in further study or graduate level employment. These strategic objectives are outlined within our overarching Strategy, *Vision 2030,* our Students and Education sub-strategy and our APP.

Our Students and Education sub-strategy[13] makes the following commitment:

> *We will set the bar high for our expectations of our students; supporting them in all aspects of their university experience but challenging them to do their best for themselves and their communities. For every student, we will provide a programme-based, student-centred route-map to becoming a professional or expert through the development of knowledge, attitudes, skills and habits specific to that discipline. What will unify our programmes will be the fore-grounding of inclusivity, sustainability and well-being across our portfolio.*

The sub-strategy was developed during, and shaped by, the pandemic and, whilst it is early days in its implementation, it drives the culture shift and changes in portfolio, policies and processes we are putting in place in partnership with our students.

1.3 Reflections on Access, Belonging and Achievement

The three aspects of our strategy – Access, Belonging, and Achievement – combine opportunity with support to drive student success and transform the places we serve. We recognise that we are at different stages of maturity with respect to intention, implementation and impact for each aspect. Our outstanding success in delivering access to higher education is evidenced through our record of work over many years. The focus on belonging, which is at the core of our Inclusive Framework (see section 2.1.1), is starting to make a cultural shift. We recognise we still need to do further work on the aspect of achievement, and post-pandemic we have a renewed focus on student continuation and completion, working from module level upwards on meeting shared targets for module first-time pass rates and course progression rates.

In the variation to our APP, approved by the OfS in November 2022, we set out what we are doing to achieve our ambitious targets for closing continuation and award gaps between students of different socio-economic groups and ethnicities through:

- providing employer-supported entry routes to higher education
- changing our approach to assessment
- increasing our students' sense of belonging
- supporting students' continuation
- increasing students' confidence and understanding of possible career pathways
- supporting all courses to embed work experience in the curriculum.

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In the sections on student experience and outcomes below, we set out how, at institutional level, we are driving delivery against these goals, setting clear accountabilities at programme and module level, but ensuring these are delivered in ways appropriate to the discipline. Evidence of impact is, as yet, limited but we are able to demonstrate how we are starting to effect improvements in lead indicators (for example, assessment submission rates).

1.4   Collaboration for Widening Participation

We are the lead institution for the Aspire to HE Uniconnect programme, working closely with further education college partners to deliver sustained outreach across Telford and the Black Country. Uniconnect has been an excellent example of partnership working since its inception in 2017. To date the partnership has delivered over 12,000 activities to over 60,000 learners including both young people and adults. This has enabled the establishment of strong working relationships, a substantial programme of on-campus, online and student-facing delivery in schools and colleges which has led to the consistent overachievement on the target ward reach set by the OfS.

We have a strong Children's University programme, working with schools to support year 5 and 6 pupils and their parents to participate in co-curricular activity and engage with the world of higher education. We also run a sustained intervention programme, 'Aspire to Uni', which works with virtual schools to support Looked After Children through mentoring and outreach activities.

We have very recently secured almost £300,000 funding from the West Midlands Combined Authority as part of the Multiply project, which aims to increase the levels of functional numeracy in the adult population across the UK. We have been contracted to develop a tutoring model using both undergraduate and postgraduate students that will be rolled out across other universities from April 2023 to address both delivery and workforce issues.

We have developed franchises with further education colleges (around 350 students in 21/22 at 12 institutions) to support them in delivering undergraduate qualifications largely to students who have studied with them at Level 3 and are unable to relocate in order to access higher education. This partnership working enables sharing of effective strategies for regional economic and social transformation through higher education. For example, whilst our students already benefit from us having a University Science Park, we are considering how we might adapt the model of employer co-location used by our partner Cheshire College South and West to enhance our links with employers and the benefits they bring to our students.

Our strategy in Health also illustrates our commitment to our Place. We work in partnership to ensure healthcare education is delivered in the communities in which our students will work as qualified professionals. We offer healthcare education at multiple locations, helping the region to become self-sufficient in health professionals and the importance of this work has been documented by the West Midlands Regional Economic Development Institute[14].

Through the Midlands Metropolitan Learning Campus, a Towns Fund investment, we are partnering with Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust, Aston University, Sandwell College and Learning Works to create a learning campus within the grounds of the Midland Metropolitan University Hospital in Smethwick. The Learning Campus will provide a major new education and skills resource, covering training from entry level to Level 7 skills, targeting hard to reach groups such as those who are homeless, out of work, or refugees with transferable skills.

We are also a partner in the Black Country and Marches Institute of Technology, which delivers provision in areas such as advanced manufacturing where there are regional skills gaps.

1.5 University Transformation Programme

Like many other institutions, we are facing significant financial challenges in the current economic climate. As a result, we have embarked on a major reshaping exercise to ensure the long-term sustainability of the University. Protecting and improving the student experience has been a key driver of this transformation programme. Thus, whilst we have delivered reductions in our staffing costs to bring them into line with sector benchmarks, through simplifying our portfolio and streamlining research, we have ensured that student-staff ratios have been protected. As part of this portfolio review, we RAG-rated all courses using recruitment figures, NSS scores and OfS metrics (early 2022 data release) and as a result have now withdrawn 138 courses.

1.6 Student Submission

Our Students' Union (SU) is making its own submission. We have not seen this but have provided support, holding several meetings with sabbatical officers and SU staff, responding to requests for information as well as providing help with understanding the data. We have also circulated earlier drafts of our own submission to committees on which the sabbatical officers sit and through this received feedback both in writing and in meetings which has been incorporated as appropriate.

2 Student Experience

The 2022 NSS results show an improvement against the 2021 results; however, we have not yet reached the satisfaction levels from the early pandemic (2020) or pre-pandemic (2019), which is consistent with the sector. Overall, our scores in 2022 are above the sector average in 16 of the 27 questions, compared to 8 in 2021. We are only significantly below benchmark for one question in 2022 (question 12 – I have been able to contact staff when I needed to) and below sector for questions related to Academic Support (−3.2pp) and Organisation and Management (−2.3pp). We are determined to improve these aspects, and have implemented initiatives aimed at doing this, as described below.
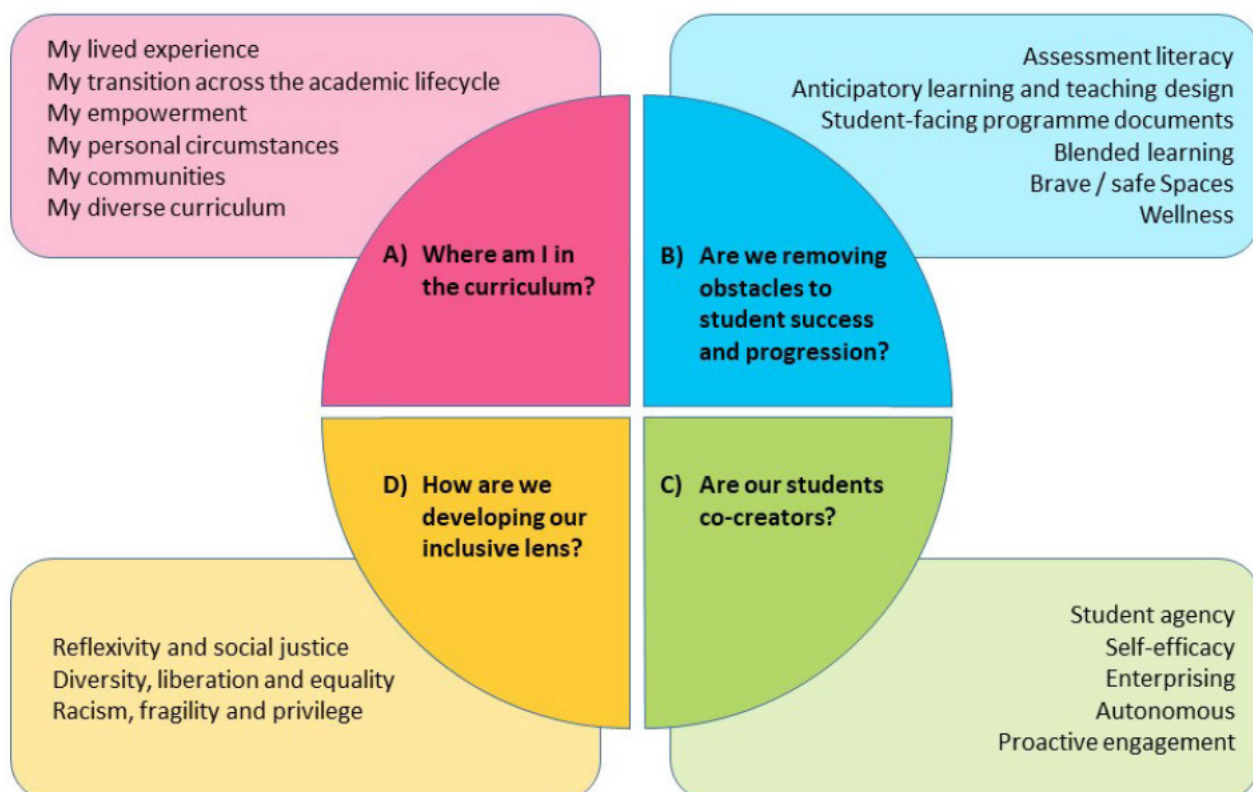
2.1 B1 Academic Experience

Prior to the pandemic, scores for teaching were at, or slightly above, sector and benchmark. As noted above, the demographics of our cohort meant that the pandemic had an extreme effect on students' ability to study and this is borne out in scores for teaching, which in 2021 fell to over 1% below benchmark and sector. As we returned to campus, we revised our structures for management of learning and teaching, adjusting the remit of faculty Associate Deans to move away from quality assurance to a broader remit of Students and Education and moving our College of Learning and Teaching out of Professional Services to report directly to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The resulting short reporting lines together with the Continuous Monitoring and Improvement (CMI) process (see section 3.1.1), facilitate a clear line of sight from course to School to faculty to institution, enabling fast-paced responses to areas of concern and the extension of local good practice. For example, the virtual learning environment (VLE) templates that had been developed by the Business School and received positive feedback from students were used as a basis for a mandatory institutional template. In 2022, we saw NSS scores for teaching move back into line with benchmark and sector.

We recognise that there is more that we can do to improve our students' perception of teaching. As part of the Inclusive Framework (see section 2.1.1), we have been working with our SU to look at the decolonisation of our curricula and the resources provided to support teaching and learning. Our approach to decolonisation has not just included discussion of the curriculum content, but also the associated pedagogies (i.e., it is not just what is included in the curriculum that is important, but also the way in which it is taught). Although the majority of our sessions involve active and participatory learning activities, our reflections on effective teaching practice during the pandemic, specifically the 'chunking' of material into blocks of no more than 20 minutes, are helping us to move us away from the notion of the 'sage on the stage' and more towards the 'guide on the side'[15] approach to teaching. This supports a move away from a western didactic approach to the acquisition of knowledge to one that is more focused on the application of this knowledge within work-related settings and contexts. We have also been in discussion with the provider of our VLE about the decolonisation of online learning environments, such as the use of western iconography.

2.1.1 Development of Inclusive Curricula

Given the diverse nature of our student body, we have long had a focus on the development and enhancement of inclusive curricula and the reduction in the awarding gap between different groups of students[16]. In order to formalise this work, and to ensure that it is implemented effectively across the institution, we launched our 'Inclusive Framework: curriculum design and delivery' (IFCDD) in July 2020. The IFCDD underpins all curriculum development and aims to ensure that our provision is inclusive for all students. This means that all students should be able to engage actively and effectively with the learning opportunities provided to them, thereby allowing them to develop to their full potential.

My lived experience
My transition across the academic lifecycle
My empowerment
My personal circumstances
My communities
My diverse curriculum

Assessment literacy
Anticipatory learning and teaching design
Student-facing programme documents
Blended learning
Brave / safe Spaces
Wellness

A) Where am I in the curriculum?

B) Are we removing obstacles to student success and progression?

D) How are we developing our inclusive lens?

C) Are our students co-creators?

Reflexivity and social justice
Diversity, liberation and equality
Racism, fragility and privilege

Student agency
Self-efficacy
Enterprising
Autonomous
Proactive engagement

University of Wolverhampton's Inclusive Framework: Curriculum Design and Delivery

Each academic School has an Inclusivity Lead, who, overseen by the institutional Associate Dean for Inclusivity (a post created in 2021), works with academic colleagues and students to develop and implement an Inclusivity Plan based on the IFCDD. This approach recognises that a 'one-size fits all' model does not work across the multiple disciplinary areas, and that flexibility is required to allow the recognition of disciplinary differences whilst maintaining high level consistency through addressing the principles of the IFCDD. The Inclusivity Plans, and associated outcomes data, are discussed as part of the CMI process, in which students are included (see section 3.1.1). Our annual two-day Inclusivity Conference for staff and students provides an opportunity to showcase and disseminate effective practice relating to the IFCDD and includes presentations from our students about their lived experiences.

Our Advance HE-accredited Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice in Higher Education has a module dedicated to supporting inclusive curriculum by design. This course is mandatory for all staff without a recognised teaching qualification.

A key area of enhancement in relation to the IFCDD has been the development of students' sense of belonging. As part of our participation in the 'What Works?' Phase II project (2012-2017), we evaluated our students' sense of belonging using Mantz Yorke's (2016) survey for engagement, belongingness and self-confidence. To determine the impact and effectiveness of the IFCDD, we repeated the survey in spring 2022 and are now running this annually. The findings from the spring 2022 survey indicate that, in comparison with the previous results, students reported higher levels of engagement and self-confidence and similar levels of belongingness. Interestingly, in terms of demographic characteristics and the work that underpins the IFCDD, students from Global Majority backgrounds had significantly higher levels of belongingness in comparison to white students (averages by ethnicity on a five-point Likert scale, with a score of 5 demonstrating a high sense of belonging, were: Black 4.05, Asian 3.97, White 3.79), which contrasted with the original 'What Works?' findings. Further evaluation is needed to determine the reasons for this change, and to see whether this is replicated in subsequent surveys, but we believe that it reflects the strategic prioritisation of inclusivity and the impact of initiatives implemented over the past few years to support our Global Majority students' sense of belonging (e.g., Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion – JEDI; Believe, Belong, Achieve; Include Me). This result is also reflected in the 2022 National Student Survey (NSS) where responses to the question 'I feel part of a community of staff and students' are higher than both the sector (by 2.75 percentage points, pp) and benchmark (by 0.96pp), reflecting larger increases among our Asian and mixed ethnicity students.

2.2   B4 Assessment
We have historically performed above sector average for assessment and feedback, although our students were hit hard by the pandemic and scores fell below benchmark in 2021. For 2022, our rating rose to 71.38% from 69.26% and against a sector average score of 68.53%. The scores for all four individual questions within the scale were higher in 2022 than in 2021.

2.2.1   Inclusive Assessment
We are committed to ensuring that assessment activities are inclusive and effective in allowing all students to demonstrate their achievement of the module and course learning outcomes. Through the implementation of the IFCDD, we have been working with course teams to look at the effectiveness of assessment activities to ensure that these are authentic and fit-for-purpose. Where appropriate, we have introduced choice for students in their assessment activities, not just in the specific topic of interest but also choice in the assessment task itself. We have set out alternative

assessments in advance, so that students know that the assessment method meets their needs. This is part of our "Tell Us Once" model whereby the responsibility to remove barriers to success sits with the University and not the student. As with other initiatives that align with our APP targets, we will be working with our students to evaluate the effectiveness, and perceptions, of assessment choice and to determine whether this has a positive impact on reducing the awarding gap.

We recognise the importance of providing appropriate digital resources to support students with their assessment activities and have completed work on the integration between our student record system and VLE to ensure that the full assessment and feedback lifecycle[17] is achieved electronically. For students, this means that all relevant information about their assessment activities, including details of assessment type, personalised submission dates, feedback comments and marks, are provided in submission portals within the VLE, increasing clarity and ease of engagement.

We have many examples of effective feedback practices in the VLE (e.g., written, audio, video, dialogic) and will be using these examples as case studies for a project being undertaken in 2022/23 to establish guidance for staff on effective practice. This work will focus on the language used in feedback, as well as the method by which feedback is provided to students, and will build on scholarship that has been undertaken between our Faculty of Arts, Business and Social Sciences and Advance HE examining 'Assessment and Feedback in Law'[18].

2.3   B2 Resources, Support and Student Engagement

We adopt a whole-institution approach to providing support for students. This approach ensures high-level consistency across the three academic faculties, whilst recognising that there will be some local nuancing to take account of disciplinary differences. This consistency is reflected in the structure of university-level committees relating to students and education (i.e., University Students and Education Committee and associated sub-committees: Learning, Teaching and Assessment; Student Experience; and Employability), which is replicated within each of the faculties.

2.3.1   Academic Support

Having been at approximately sector and benchmark for NSS questions on the academic support scale in 2019, our scores declined in absolute and relative terms during the pandemic. Scores for questions 13 and 14 on advice and guidance on courses and on study choices are now within 1% of both benchmark and sector in 2022. Question 12 – "I have been able to contact staff when I needed to" – continues to have a negative impact on the overall scale score. We are now 7.79pp below sector and 5.83pp below benchmark for this question, with the score declining from 73.06% in 2021 to 72.50% in 2022. The availability of members of staff, both academic and professional, remains an on-going area for action and to understand why our students continue to report that it is difficult to contact staff. We are sharing learning from those subject areas that have scored particularly well across the institution. For example, the Year Tutors that have been a success in Law are now being trialled in Engineering.

During the pandemic we experienced significant issues with students in one faculty being able to contact student services. In 2021/22 we redesigned our student support function into one central ASK@Wlv team under the leadership of a new post of Head of Student Customer Services. We are now able to set target response rates and monitor these as well as offering a standard triage system for all students. The move to ASK@Wlv has not been without difficulties, because of staffing shortages (exacerbated by delays caused by the University Transformation Programme

over the summer) and underlying systems issues. The Governing Body has just agreed investment in our student records system and we are now near completing recruitment to an expanded team and so on track to meet our service level agreement rates this semester.

A high proportion of our students are the first in their family to go to university and many come to us as mature students, making the transition to higher education a challenge for many. Belonging underpins the IFCDD and its themes of transition across the academic cycle, empowerment, communities, self-efficacy, proactive engagement and anticipatory learning and design. Over this TEF period we have developed a new approach to academic and pastoral support through our Academic Coach model.

2.3.2 Academic Coaches

The evolution of the Academic Coaches (AC) scheme started in 2018. Our retention and continuation statistics for Level 3 and 4 students were not acceptable and needed to be addressed. ACs were piloted in two academic faculties (we had four academic faculties at this time). The scheme had an initial target to retain an additional 50 students in each faculty in the first two years. One discipline area, Law, achieved this in one year. Based on this success, and evidence of impact on retention, attainment, and transition, we recruited ACs for all faculties in 2019/20.

ACs support all students in Levels 3 and 4. In response to positive student feedback and adapting to our changing student population, additional ACs have been in place since 2021 to support Postgraduate Taught international students. The AC role is to help students achieve, progress and transition into and through their course: they could be considered as 'Personal Tutor Plus'. On average, each AC has 200 students under their care. 70% of the ACs are our graduates and 43% are from Global Majority communities, which aligns with our overall student population (46%). This not only helps the ACs empathise more closely with students but also gives them a unique insight into the student experience.

A recent evaluation of the AC Scheme analysed data for students who have and have not engaged with an AC. This demonstrated that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between students' engagement with an AC and continuation rates. Overall, engagement with an AC is associated with a significant increase in the likelihood of Global Majority and IMD 1 and 2 students continuing their studies[19]. Descriptive analysis also suggested that when disabled students, and students who had disclosed a mental health issue, engaged with an AC they were more likely to continue with their studies compared with those who did not engage.

We keep under constant review the initiatives we implement to enhance student support. Prior to introducing ACs, we developed a Graduate Teaching Assistant scheme through which we recruited our own graduates onto a two-year teaching development programme leading to a PGCE qualification. In 2019/20, we reviewed this and, whilst outcomes for the individual GTAs were excellent, we could not demonstrate significant positive impact on progression rates. We therefore withdrew the GTA programme and redeployed resource into a new post-qualification role, the Student Transition Teacher (STT) from 2020/21 onwards. The STTs have contributed to the excellent outcomes we have seen for Maths support; however, we did not see the improvements in Foundation Year results that we sought. With the redesign of the Foundation Year, and empowering the STTs to design as well as deliver, we are confident that we will see improvements.

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An important enhancement to the AC model introduced in 21/22 was the creation of three Senior Academic Coach (SAC) posts. The SACs line manage the ACs for their own faculty and work as a single team under the leadership of our University Student Transitions Lead. This has enabled us to systematise, monitor and evaluate interventions. The SACs oversee the analysis of the Individual Learner Profiles (ILP) completed by new entrants at the start of their coaching and mentoring relationship with their AC and use this dialogical approach to shape our support to meet the needs of our students. For example, 5% of the students completing ILPs in semester 1 of this year reported that they did not have stable accommodation. In response to this, our Academic Lead for Mental Health and Wellbeing put together resources and guidance for ACs and others supporting students who are facing precarious housing situations.

We are reviewing how we manage the transition between the ACs at Levels 3 and 4 to Personal Tutors at Levels 5 and 6. Our Faculty of Science and Engineering is piloting an end-of-year questionnaire that provides Level 5 Personal Tutors with specific information that the Level 4 students would like to share about their strengths and areas for development.

2.3.3   Supporting Students' Mental Health and Wellbeing
In December 2022, working with students, staff and regional partners, we launched our new Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy[20], which acknowledges that inclusivity, belonging and wellbeing reinforce each other. The strategy treats wellbeing as a form of social capital that is embodied and accumulated through an individual's life journey. Our aims are to support staff and students when a student's health, wellbeing and/or behaviours are having a detrimental impact on their ability to progress academically and seek to ensure, wherever possible, that students can participate effectively in their academic studies and other aspects of their student experience. At the core of the strategy is co-production with our students and our community. Wolverhampton City Council has funded a one-year pilot scheme to employ   a Wellbeing Coordinator who leads a university-wide group of volunteer student champions to deliver health and wellbeing activities and to promote self-care.

To support student wellbeing whilst on placement, we are working on the OfS-funded PACE project with three groups of students in nursing, primary education and engineering. One of the first aims of the project has been to evaluate and co-develop a co-exploration and co-production model with those students, which will both inform our IFCDD and be available for the sector. This will have implications for how we consider the student voice and more importantly how we interpret and use it to shape our offer. There are 62 students participating in the project, and they have developed a suite of resources that they feel would have helped them at the start of their course. One such resource within the nursing thread is a video recording that students can give to their friends and family to not only give them a better understanding of the course demands and how they may help, but also to simply say an anticipatory 'thank you'. The students have authored and directed every aspect of the video which will be available within the project's resource pages[21].

2.3.4   Three Minutes to Save a Life
'Three minutes to Save a Life' is our pioneering programme dedicated to tackling suicide and self-harm, which has led to changes in the delivery of our counselling services to students. Since its inception in 2014, the 'Three Minutes to Save a Life' training has been delivered to over 2,000 staff and students. It featured as a case study within the 2021 OfS topic briefing on suicide prevention, as well as the 2019 UUK Suicide Safer Universities Guidance. In 2018, 'Three Minutes to Save a Life' was selected by the UUK Made at Uni campaign in the category for community impact. We

have also hosted a sector wide suicide prevention, intervention and postvention event (attended by over 120 delegates), which was used to facilitate the launch of the UUK placement learning checklist and the sharing information with trusted contacts guide in October 2022.

2.3.5   Support to Study Policy

In 2022 we developed our Support to Study Policy and Trusted Person Notification Procedure. A new post of Support to Study Coordinator triages, assesses, processes, and tracks all escalations of concern, and coordinates all stages of the policy, which includes anticipatory support planning for students who take a leave of absence.

The Support to Study Policy aims to foster a confident information-sharing culture, breaking down some of the barriers that we acknowledge have previously constrained effective working across the institution. A multi-disciplinary cause for concern panel meets weekly, comprising colleagues from accommodation, security and estates, faculty-based representatives, safeguarding, hardship, disability and inclusion, mental health and wellbeing. This ensures that any red flags that are known can be joined up, and a whole-student approach to supporting the cause for concern can be agreed, enacted, tracked, evaluated and, where necessary, the need to share information externally can be completed by trained staff.

2.3.6   Integrating Financial and Pastoral Support

Even before the pandemic and the current cost of living crisis, a significant proportion of our student population has dealt with financial hardship whilst seeking to complete their studies. A relatively large number of our students have to extend their studies beyond the maintenance loan entitlement period. We are as generous as we can be with direct financial support and supplement this with guidance and advice, taking a holistic student case view that joins up academic, pastoral and financial support. Our previous travel bursary has been replaced by the Wolverhampton Wallet, which gives all new full-time UK undergraduate students £200 in their first year and £100 on successful enrolment onto the next level of their studies to spend on digital and technology products, stationery, books and mobile data. Our hardship fund is now open to international as well as home students. This is supplemented by a range of initiatives, often in partnership with the SU, other student groups and external community organisations; for example, our current Periods Matter campaign.

2.3.7   Student Engagement and Attendance

In September 2018, we introduced a new Engagement and Attendance Policy. The policy was based on consultation with staff and students and responses to a survey (471 staff and 4625 student responses). Consultation responses identified that the focus of the policy should be on active engagement, rather than physical attendance. In September 2020, having reviewed the data on continuation and retention, it was decided to revise this policy to emphasise the importance to students of physical attendance in addition to active engagement. An attendance monitoring system was implemented in 2021/22 that works with both face-to-face and online provision. To ensure that students recognise the importance of returning to on-campus activities, the use of the attendance monitoring system has been emphasised for the 2022/23 academic year and we have observed a 9% increase in attendance during semester 1 compared with the same period last year. We will shortly be launching an engagement dashboard to give ACs and Personal Tutors early visibility of students' engagement.

2.3.8 Learning Resources

Since the introduction of this NSS scale in 2017, and prior to 2021, we scored above the sector and benchmark; however, in 2021 our scores decreased by more than the sector and benchmark taking us below these averages. In 2022, our rating improved from 70.81% in 2021 to 79.74% (an increase of 8.93pp) against a sector increase of 7.32pp and a benchmark increase of 6.89pp. Satisfaction with Library resources has now moved back above the sector (0.38pp) and benchmark (0.28pp) with IT resources and course-specific resources remaining below sector and benchmark.

Investment in Kortext

We have invested in a complete eTextbook offer to provide all students with their own digital copies of all their essential reading. Just under 3,000 eTextbooks are provided via the Kortext Complete platform with analytics from the last full year (2021/22) showing 17,000 registered (13,000 regular and active) users. Between them they accessed 8 million pages of reading with study sessions lasting over 82,000 hours. Students made over 140,000 annotations and notes on the eTexts and printed out just under 120,000 sections or chapters showing high levels of engagement with the texts. Feedback from students is measured through regular engagement touchpoints, including drop-in sessions, feedback walls, the provision of Kortext student ambassadors, and regular monitoring of analytics.

2.3.9 Support for Learning

University-wide academic support is provided by our Skills for Learning team (S4L), based within our libraries. The S4L team provides an extensive suite of online resources as well as one-to-one support and workshops. Areas of support include: digital skills; academic writing; critical writing; English for academic purposes; academic integrity; referencing; presentation skills; examination skills; skills for researchers; and maths support. The team works closely with academic staff to ensure that academic skills are developed and embedded within the curriculum, so that students can practise and acquire these skills within the appropriate disciplinary contexts. The S4L team also works closely with the ACs to ensure that students can be provided with the support they need for successful academic transition into higher education.

As part of our University Transformation Programme (see section 1.5), we have created a new Directorate of Students and Education. This Directorate is responsible for developing, maintaining and implementing institutional frameworks, standards and policies for all aspects of our taught portfolio and all elements of the student experience. As part of this, we have brought together key areas for supporting students and staff, such as S4L, Educational Developers, maths support and English for Academic Purposes. This ensures a joined-up approach to supporting all elements of the student journey.

2.3.10 Capital Investment

As an institution we have continued to strive to enhance the student experience through capital investment on our three campuses by providing state of the art facilities in places of need. Over the past four years our investment has been significant:

Health

One of the common themes across a number of our investments has been the introduction of simulated learning facilities. This can be seen in two significant investments in our nursing and allied health provision, through an investment of £4.8 million on our Walsall Campus and a further £5m on our Telford campus, complementing our facilities in Wolverhampton, building on our mission to provide education in place.

Built Environment

The development of the Springfield campus has led to a brand new £45m school of Architecture and Built Environment that brings together laboratories, modern flexible teaching facilities, data technology and virtual reality, bringing our students and industry together to collaborate on real world challenges. This facility is further complemented with the opening of the National Brownfield Institute, a £14.9m investment providing further research opportunities around sustainable construction and brownfield regeneration. This utilises one of the UK's first 360 visualisation Igloo suites, along with technology such as state of the art robotics designed by Boston Dynamics, one of only two in the UK, providing unique opportunities for our students.

Creative Industries

Our investment of over £5m in a new state of the art Screen School is testimony to our commitment to the creative industries whilst moving our offer in line with the needs of industry. This investment brings together games design, illustration, film and television production, animation, journalism and is co-located within our School of Engineering, Computing and Mathematical Sciences to support greater collaboration opportunities between these disciplines.

Science

In 2022 we opened our £3m pharmacy facilities (mainly funded through an OfS capital funding grant) to meet the growing student numbers in this area, providing our students with multipurpose teaching spaces, simulation space and professional learning spaces.

Sport and Allied Health

Our latest development will be an investment of £6m (again supported by OfS funding) in the refurbishment of facilities to provide state of the art skills-based teaching facilities that support our sports and wider allied health provision on our Walsall campus. In addition, we have further enhanced the access to additional sports facilities through our sponsorship of the brand new Commonwealth swimming pool in Sandwell, which provides access for our students.

2.3.11 Responding to the Pandemic

The disruption caused by the pandemic served as a catalyst for innovation and the redesign of many elements of the student experience. The restrictions of lockdown and gradual re-opening meant that many of the facilities and experiences that had been key parts of student life were unavailable to many of our students at that time. We therefore sought other ways of ensuring that they had access to support and to high-quality learning. Additional support was put in place to address the digital poverty experienced by many of our students. For example, in response to questions within the Jisc Student Digital Insights Survey in 2020/21, 51.3% of our students identified that poor Wi-Fi had been a problem for them and 19% did not have access to a computer or similar device. Laptop loans and Wi-Fi dongles were made available to students who had previously relied on use of on-campus IT equipment[22]. When on-campus facilities re-opened, we developed a revised laptop loan scheme to ensure that digital poverty was not preventing our students from engaging fully with their learning.

Digital learning activities identified by students as being effective during the pandemic are being continued where appropriate (e.g., virtual or physical meetings with tutors or supervisors; engagement with pre-recorded material to enhance face-to-face sessions; recordings of sessions). Support services have also retained flexibility. For example, our mental health and wellbeing

support has been broadened to enable multiple means of engagement, with one-to-one support provided via MS Teams, telephone or in-person (thereby reducing waiting time for appointments), and group support through weekly 'Let's Talk About …' sessions. As described in section 2.3.12 below, results from the Jisc Digital Student Insights surveys show improving scores for student satisfaction with blended and digital learning, with us being above sector in many questions.

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated a review of assessment methods. Whilst the resulting move away from examinations for many areas was a pragmatic response to lockdown, the way in which we managed this review was academically-led and foregrounded with inclusivity in mind. We are continuing to monitor at a module level the differential impact of assessment activities on different student groups (e.g., Global Majority, disabled students) to determine which of the assessment activities introduced during the pandemic should continue, as examples of effective and inclusive assessment practice.

During the pandemic, we exercised a trust-based approach to extenuating circumstances. Our students had previously told us that cultural differences – for example, around bereavement – meant that justifying requests, and providing evidence of grounds for mitigation, created barriers for some. Following the pandemic, we have undertaken a review of our extenuating circumstances claims assessment and processing procedure, particularly to ensure that we are supporting students' mental wellbeing and any emerging or actual safeguarding need. We have from last semester moved the process from being a largely administrative function to one that involves a central representative panel from across the University that meets weekly to review all claims. This ensures we take a compassionate and individualised approach to responding to claims underpinned with principles aligned to safeguarding and confident information sharing. For example, if a student lists that they are homeless or about to be made homeless, a member of the hardship team will contact them immediately. The loops are further closed in prompting the student's Personal Tutor or AC to book a slot with them in light of the claim, and this is tracked and followed up by the Support to Study Coordinator.

2.3.12 Support for Staff Professional Development
KUDOS Scheme
The KUDOS scheme was launched in September 2015 as our accredited continuing professional development route for recognising colleagues as Associate Fellows, Fellows and Senior Fellows of the Higher Education Academy. Colleagues wishing to be recognised as Principal Fellows are supported to make direct applications to Advance HE and we pay the assessment costs.

Figures from Advance HE show that 74% of our academic staff are recognised with one of the Higher Education Academy Fellowship categories. The annual data from Advance HE demonstrate that we are consistently higher than the sector and our mission group averages for the number of Senior Fellowships recognised each year.

	Wolverhampton	**Mission group average**	**Sector average**
2017-18	67	12	13
2018-19	30	14	15
2019-20	22	13	14
2020-21	40	13	13
2021-22	26	8	12

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The KUDOS Scheme is open to all members of staff, and 13% of our fellowships are held by colleagues in professional departments. We believe it is important that all members of staff recognise, and can demonstrate, how they have a positive impact on students' learning experiences. Many of these fellowships are held by colleagues in academic-related positions (e.g., careers, library), but we have also recognised colleagues from departments such as Digital Services, Registry and Estates and Facilities (e.g., developing effective learning spaces).

Our strategic use of the KUDOS Scheme, and specifically the linkage with the IFCDD, was identified as an example of effective practice and included as one of the case studies for the Advance HE 2022 publication '*Utilising the Professional Standards Framework for teaching and supporting learning for strategic transformation*'[23].

The KUDOS Scheme also hosts our two Staff & Educational Development Association (SEDA) Professional Development Framework courses: 'Learning to Tutor Online' and 'Digital Transformations'. These courses have been running since 2017 and played an important part in our transition to online learning during the pandemic. Members of staff who had completed these courses were able to support colleagues in the move to effective online learning and teaching support. Over the past three years of our participation in the Jisc Student Digital Insights survey, we have a seen a steady increase in positive feedback from our students in response to the question relating to the quality of the online and digital learning on their course:

- In 2020/21, 68.9% of the students responding to the survey rated the quality of online and digital learning on their course as good (42%), excellent (22.5%) or best imaginable (4.4%) (2,024 responses).
- In 2021/22, the overall rating of quality increased to 72.1% with 39.6% rating it as good, 26% as excellent and 6.5% as the best imaginable (1,517 responses).
- In 2022/23, the overall rating of quality increased again to 78.0% with 42% rating it as good, 29% as excellent and 7% as the best imaginable (2,308 responses).

Whilst recognising that there is still work to do in this area, it is reassuring to note the steady improvement in this student feedback about the quality of their online learning.

Other Professional Development Activities
As part of induction, all new members of academic staff participate in our 'Essentials of the Classroom' training. This is a requirement for new colleagues who have not taught before, as well as anyone who may have taught at other institutions. The purpose of the session is to introduce new colleagues to the different nature of the institution and the student body. The individual sessions within the training focus on: learning and teaching at the University; supporting students; learning and teaching in a digital age; and research integrity.

Our three faculty-based Associate Deans (Students and Education) work closely with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the Directorate of Students and Education to ensure consistency across the institution regarding training activities. This includes, for example, training on analysing institutional data in preparation for completion of the CMI touchpoints, and Personal Tutor training.

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CARE Framework and Review of Academic Staff Objectives

Our Organisational Development (OD) unit provides additional training and development activities (e.g., induction, leadership and management, appraisal). The OD team has developed an institutional CARE Framework, launched in March 2021, which describes staff behaviours which align with our values. It is all about being Collaborative (e.g., co-creating solutions with students), Ambitious (e.g., using coaching-style conversations to help others to achieve their goals), Respectful (e.g., clarifying the diverse requirements of students and accepting, valuing and respecting them), Effective (e.g., understanding what is hindering progress and working on a plan to resolve this). We have mapped our CARE framework onto the IFCDD to support healthy discussions around curriculum within our appraisal process.

We recognise, however, that the introduction of such a framework is not sufficient if colleagues do not see that they are recognised and rewarded for excellence in learning and teaching or indeed if there are not penalties for failing to deliver. Therefore, we are launching a set of academic staff objectives that will be used for objective setting, appraisals (and thus, where needed, performance management). As well as creating organisational efficiencies, having standard objectives creates a golden thread tying individual objectives to institutional KPIs. This drives equity, both in the objectives against which colleagues' performance are being judged and in students' entitlement to excellence. Below is the example of how *all* staff will be appraised on teaching.

Staff who are:	Objective	Direct Measures	Indirect Measures	Key Performance Targets
Teaching	Design and deliver excellent and inclusive teaching and assessment	Student module survey scores and feedback; first time pass and good honours rates – absolute and splits; nominations for SU awards; peer observation feedback	GOS scores; NSS scores; continuation rates; completion rates (absolutes and splits)	First time module pass rates > 80% and no statistically significant gaps by protected characteristic

2.4   Student Voice

Student voice is an area in which we score highly in the NSS. In COVID-affected 2021 scores dropped to sector average, and were below benchmark, but this year they have improved again and now sit at 69.76% (an increase of 3.32pp) above the sector score of 66.54% (which increased by 0.10pp) and a benchmark score of 67.85% (which increased by 0.19pp). Results for each individual question within this scale also scoring above sector and benchmark.

During the pandemic we made significant attempts to work with students on our management of lockdown and we had active student representatives on the cross-institutional "silver" group which managed the transfer of teaching, assessment and student support to online, to partial return to campus and finally full return to campus. We continue to work closely with our students to ensure our approach to student voice remains effective.

We work closely with our SU on initiatives relating to the student voice. Students are members of our committees at institutional, faculty and school level, and two SU representatives (the elected President and Vice President Academic) are members of our Board of Governors. Students have partnered in the development of our Students and Education sub-strategy of the University's Vision

2030 through workshops, drafting elements of the sub-strategy and consultation. In addition to student Course Representatives, who are volunteers, we have a set of student School Representatives who are employed (through the SU) to undertake specific activities. These School Reps act as conduits between the students, Course Reps, SU and University. They are complemented by a set of SU Liberation Reps representing, and acting as the voice for, student groups that have been highlighted as being underrepresented (i.e., international, disability, LGBTQ+, mature, women and Global Majority). These roles represent the student voice on key committees, task and finish groups and workstreams, and in the CMI process (see section 3.1.1). They also played a vital role during the pandemic in feeding back the views of students in relation to the changes that were being made and the effectiveness of our communications in notifying students about these changes.

3   Student Outcomes

As highlighted in the Provider Context section, the profile of our students means that we experience some additional challenges in terms of Student Outcomes. To address this, we have placed a significant emphasis on improving retention and progression (between levels). Our approach is evidence-based and data-driven with analysis of both OfS datasets and up-to-date internal data available to and utilised by staff from our Executive Team through to individual Module Leaders, and the evaluation of the impact of our activities underpinning the approach.

3.1   Institutional Oversight of Student Outcomes

3.1.1   Continuous Monitoring and Improvement (CMI) Scheme

In 2020/21, in recognition of the need to review all relevant metrics and to take action where required, we moved away from a monitoring approach that focused on periodic reviews and changed this to a whole-University Continuous Monitoring and Improvement (CMI) process that reviews data for all undergraduate and postgraduate and collaborative partner courses. (We have a separate CMI process focusing on apprenticeships.) CMI is a 'live' process with interventions and actions identified and resolved at the earliest opportunity. The process is embedded across all our provision – at module, programme, School and faculty levels. It is designed to be risk-based and enhancement-focused, using metrics-based evidence and qualitative data, allowing course teams to understand where to focus improvement measures and where actions will be decided.

The CMI process has been designed to enable staff to monitor student outcomes at all levels of our portfolio against our internal and external benchmarks, including a particular focus on student feedback, and to design appropriate interventions to improve outcomes, where appropriate, and to share practice where outcomes are strong. The process monitors and reviews the alignment of programmes with external standards, and our own standards including internal benchmarks.

One of the key elements of CMI is Touchpoint 3, where a panel chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and comprising senior University staff and students, meets with every School to consider School-level data and outcomes, as well as themes arising from other sources such as free text comments from internal and external student feedback, and comments from external examiners looking at provision within the School. Heads of School raise issues from programmes within their department which need to be addressed from a School-level perspective, as well as other cross-departmental / faculty issues. The meeting also considers any relevant issues raised in programme-level reports from collaborative partner provision. Where actions agreed at a School level require consideration at a faculty level, these are cascaded for consideration during the faculty review stage of the process.

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An annual overview report of the entire continuous monitoring process is presented to the University Students and Education Committee and to other relevant University-level committees. The report reviews and notes outcomes from all levels of the process, as well as considering aspects of the operation of the process itself. The process of integrated meetings at all levels means that colleagues are aware of institution-wide support schemes for students and of their roles in implementing University policies, such as our Student Engagement Policy. It also helps to ensure that practice across the University is informed by the lessons learnt in specific areas, rather than the impact being confined within disciplinary or organisational silos. For example, this has led to a review of the number, type and timings of assessments at module level and has raised awareness of the impact of issues with enrolment, enabling focused work on improvements.

3.1.2   Subject Portfolio Review
In 21/22, we introduced a Subject Portfolio Review process that is undertaken by the Executive Team. Chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, this annual review uses the same underlying student datasets as the CMI process and considers key internal (retention; progression between levels) and external (continuation; completion; NSS; GOS) metrics whilst also considering student number and financial contribution data in order to give a complete picture of subject performance. Subjects are RAG-rated, with those rated Red to be deemed at risk of closure and those rated Amber requiring improvement action plans. Findings from the Portfolio Review alongside substantive issues raised via the CMI process are then fed into School Performance meetings where decisions as to the required action are finalised. The portfolio review undertaken last academic year means that we are now in teach-out for a large number of courses which historically had poor outcomes.

3.2   Continuation
Our latest continuation rates remain above threshold for other undergraduate, first degree and undergraduate with postgraduate and above benchmark for apprenticeship courses. Our Foundation Year (FY) has improved but remains significantly below benchmark. Through the CMI process in 20/21 and 21/22, we identified concerns with learning, teaching and assessment across our FY courses. As a result, we instigated a cross-institutional review of our FY curricula, teaching and assessment, and established a number of improvement actions.

In 2019/20, we significantly expanded our international recruitment. This expansion was predominantly in the business and management subject area, with international student numbers increasing from 150 in 2018/19 to 705 in 2019/20 across both undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses. The first cohort of these international students commenced in January and February of 2020, and consequently were severely and disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and the first lockdown in March 2020. As a result, the continuation rate for the Business School fell to 66% for 2020/21 (from 78% in 2019/20) but has since increased to 77% within the 2021/22 data. It should be noted that other students within the Business School were less severely impacted and the 2020/21 continuation rate for these students was 79%.

The alleviation of the pandemic naturally removed some of the challenges faced by students and delivered improved student outcomes; however, and more significantly, we also immediately responded to the data and adjusted our approach to recruitment in the specific markets, introducing a variety of additional admissions requirements. The introduction of our attendance monitoring system in 2021/22 has resulted in additional reporting and interventions being put in place for international students through our UKVI Compliance Team. We have also made

significant investment in a group of dedicated ACs working to support international students' transition into UK higher education. These mitigations have seen subsequent international cohorts performing significantly better, with the business and management continuation rate for 2021/22 at 77%, and the progression rate from year 1 to year 2 increasing by 17.5pp.

During the pandemic our priority was supporting students to be able to continue with their studies rather than on timely progression. A significant proportion of our students were only able to continue because we supported them in delaying studies and/or assessment. This was undoubtedly the right thing to do in the context of lockdown but from the start of this academic year we have shifted the dial to "passing first time is the expectation" for both students and staff. We have set a first time pass rate of 80% as the norm for all modules. During the early part of this academic year we held meetings, led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (and with student representatives invited), where, for all modules with a pass rate of less than 80% in 2021/22, Module Leaders set out action plans for how they would improve teaching, assessment or student engagement (or a mix of all three as appropriate) in order to meet and exceed these targets. We have reviewed our procedures for module change so that we are able to make enhancements immediately where these are for the benefit of the student experience.

As part of this review of module level outcomes, we have analysed differences between Global Majority and white students across our whole portfolio. By identifying those modules where these differences are statistically significant (79 out of a total of 835), Schools are now able to focus efforts to understand and address these.

3.3   Completion

We remain above threshold in all indicators for completion, with the exception of the FYs where we are 16pp below threshold and 5.9pp below benchmark. Two of our first undergraduate degree splits are below threshold: mixed ethnicity at 73.3% and ABCS at 70.2%.

As part of last year's Portfolio Review, we suspended recruitment immediately to a number of our FYs. As part of this year's review, we have RAG-rated Red FYs in Computer Science, Health & Wellbeing, and Public Health & Social Care. Whilst we do not want to withdraw from courses that provide a pipeline into these critical sectors for our region, we are planning to consolidate our FY offering as part of the merger of the existing School of Public Health Studies and School of Society and Community.

We are taking the same granular approach to improvement of completion as we are to continuation, with the emphasis on increasing first time pass rates at Levels 5 and 6 also. High failure rates have historically been significantly affected by non-submissions, hence the efforts we are making to enhance student attendance, engagement and belonging described in section 2. Whilst we acknowledge that there is still much to do, it is affirming to see that our semester 1 submission rate across all levels has improved by 8% in 2022/3 compared with 2021/2.

3.3.1   *Progression to Graduate Level Employment*

Panel feedback on our previous TEF submission highlighted that progression to employment or further study for full-time students was above the then benchmark. They noted the involvement of employers in the development and review of all programmes, the embedding of the Enterprise and Employability Award Scheme in academic programmes and the Enterprise and Employability strategy to support student start-ups.

Whilst progression to employment rather than highly skilled employment is no longer a key metric for the OfS, it remains important for our students and our region. As set out above, our context offers limited graduate level employment opportunities and our region has one of the highest rates of youth unemployment nationally, with 8.9% of 18- to 24-year-olds in the Black Country claiming out of work benefits, compared with 6.1% in the West Midlands and 4.7% nationally[24]. Thus, the absolute employment rate of 88% remains a critical affirmation of our students' success.

At institutional level we meet the threshold for progression to highly skilled employment. We are below threshold for progression for Asian students and are working to address this. Across our subject areas, it is notable that the subjects where we are above benchmark are those where the course provides a qualifying route into graduate level work. Those where we are below the threshold tend to be those subjects where a "degree is not enough"[25] and where success in the graduate job market requires a significant store of social capital, which most of our students do not possess. As noted above, many of our students do not enjoy the geographic mobility that unlocks much social mobility.

The broader GOS findings demonstrate that our graduates experience positive impacts from their studies – 72.2% of our graduates agree with the statement 'I am utilising what I learnt during my studies in my current activity' (sector average 70.9%) and progressing to meaningful activities – 86.3% of our graduates report that their current activity is meaningful (sector average 85.7%)[26].

Enterprise and employer engagement in curricula development are key elements of our employability. These have been broadened so that we now focus on developing students' confidence to compete for graduate-level employment and we are working with regional employers to co-create graduate level skills-based solutions to business needs. Examples of this include entrepreneurial solutions for social care and our £5m investment in our Screen School, which is shifting our arts provision to meeting the shape of creative industries growth in the region, and which is also helping to address the Government's Levelling Up agenda in the West Midlands.

To ensure that we are delivering support appropriate to different disciplines and cohorts, we have restructured our employability support, moving Careers Development Consultants and Advisors from the central team to be based in faculties. This will enable us to build on our more targeted approach that we have introduced post pandemic. Since 2021/22, our Careers Development Consultants have worked with course leaders to deliver enhanced employability provision within the curriculum, prioritising courses with lower rates of graduate employment and a negative gap for Global Majority students and those from IMD quintiles 1 and 2. As an example, 52% of students enter our paramedic course from IMD quintiles 1 and 2. This course is placed in the top 10 nationally for student satisfaction in the NSS (number 1 in the region), and 95% of graduates are in highly skilled work 15 months after graduation. 100% of graduates said that they were utilising what they had learnt during their studies in their current work.

Similarly, we are refreshing our alumni mentoring scheme which historically has been run centrally with some limited success, but which has not attracted students in the numbers that we would wish. What has been more impactful is the coaching and mentoring scheme run in partnership with the Chartered Management Institute within our Business School. Drawing on this success, we have given the Business School lead on coaching and mentoring an institutional-wide responsibility and she is leading a series of mentoring and buddying pilots in four different Schools this year. We will use these to establish a framework for mentoring within which Schools will develop schemes that are appropriate to their students' needs and engage alumni within the life of the School.

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We offer a range of employability-related opportunities and initiatives throughout the whole student lifecycle, encouraging and supporting students to develop skills from the point of arrival throughout their period of study and beyond. Our graduates can access our careers resources for a period of three years after graduation. We also offer our final year students an opportunity to work with a mentor. Our aim is to provide students with opportunities to get involved in the work of their profession before they graduate. For the large proportion of our students in health and education, work-based placements are an integral part of their course. Additionally, 52.7% of our students are studying on PSRB-accredited courses (over 10,000 students on over 650 courses), with learning and assessments being practice-based and with a requirement for all courses to provide students with work-related experiences through placements, projects and volunteering. Owing to affordability, relatively few of our students undertake a sandwich year or study abroad year, so we seek to provide work-based learning that is embedded within the standard three-year course. There is a demand for unpaid internships across the region and we are using funding to support students and graduates into these positions. During the pandemic we launched access to virtual placements, which proved very popular with our students, so these have now been embedded within some of our courses. For example, if it is not possible to include live businesses within a Business School module, the School works with Forage, a global organisation providing online work experience opportunities.

Each academic School has an Employability Strategy, which is developed and co-ordinated by an employability lead, working in partnership with our careers professionals. The strategies highlight how Schools work with employers (e.g., inputting to curriculum content and design; involvement in recruitment and employability activities), ensure that assessment activities are authentic and based on real-world scenarios where possible, and provide volunteering and/or placement opportunities where appropriate. As examples:

- our Law students work as volunteers in our Legal Advice Centre, which provides free legal advice for the local community and especially for those unable to obtain legal assistance through other charitable organisations, such as the Citizens Advice
- the Interpreting subject uses situated learning as a framework to provide student British Sign Language Interpreters with semi-authentic simulated assignments in domains of work such as healthcare interpreting, legal interpreting and social care interpreting
- our final year Chemistry and Chemical Engineering students have worked with a local family-owned company's Research and Development team to create a new synthesis method for manufacturing non-bleed type pH strips
- students in the Business School create an online personal brand using social media websites to either secure a job or to set up their own business. They learn the strategic use of social media websites alongside several digital marketing tools mainly Google analytics 4, Buffer, WordPress and Google Ads. Once their professional digital brand is ready, they improve its ranking in Google's and Bing's search engine result pages (SERPs) and learn the art of Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)

The diversity of our student population and our institutional commitment to inclusivity, has meant that we are well-placed to work with employers who are concerned to facilitate equal access to graduate jobs irrespective of age, background, disability, gender, race or sexual orientation. We are fully aware that some of our students will have concerns about disclosing a disability, gender

type, nationality, race, age, non-traditional qualifications or sexual orientation at the pivotal junctures of applying for jobs and being employed. We were one of two universities to pilot the access to work adjustment passport for disabled students[27]. Our annual 'Inclusive Careers Conference' is designed to empower our learners with a better understanding of their rights and of positive practices in the world of work.

These are early days for this refreshed approach to employability of individual focus, local delivery, and institutional oversight. It is affirming to see the increases in self-confidence recorded in our graduate gains survey (see section 3.3.3) with 83.7% of students reporting high level of self-confidence after completing their course. We have set a target of an increase of 14pp to 90% for students reporting that the University has helped them progress in their chosen career path.

3.3.2 Evaluation

Drawing on learning from our APP, we have embedded a whole-institution approach to evaluation, strategically co-ordinating evaluation work across the University to ensure a robust evaluation culture, improving standards of evidence, and identifying what works and what does not work in improving student outcomes with reference to our strategic priorities. This work will play a pivotal role in improving equity of outcomes and ensuring our students reach their full potential. We are harnessing the expertise of our academics and our project leads, building capacity and incorporating an independent perspective into our evaluations. Students are encouraged to input to this process, through surveys and through student representation on our University Evaluation Group. Theories of Change are now more widely implemented across the University and some of our projects are using randomised controlled trials to support determination of causality. This systematic approach was established in 2020 and has started to have an impact in determining what activities we should continue, stop or review in order to have a positive impact on our students' learning experiences.

3.3.3 Educational Gain

Our definition of educational gain can be articulated as:

> *"We are committed to removing barriers to ensure that all our students are able to reach their own full potential, regardless of their personal circumstances and characteristics. We will achieve this through inclusivity and ensuring equity of outcome. This commitment recognises who is participating and how they achieve, so that all can participate and achieve their potential. We will develop our approach guided by the social and affirmation models of outcome, adapting the way we work to suit individual needs, adding value to their experience and ensuring they become successful ambassadors for the University of Wolverhampton."*

In terms of measuring educational gain, we have been listed in the top ten universities for social mobility in a paper published by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI). In particular, the paper, 'Designing an English Social Mobility Index'[28], explains that the current focus on judging universities by the salaries of their graduates fails to take into account individuals' personal circumstances and how far they have travelled.

We have also implemented a graduate gains exit survey, to support the determination of our educational gain. This was completed for the first time at our summer and autumn 2022 graduations. The survey was completed by 622 students (undergraduate and postgraduate) and aimed to measure student self-perceptions of how attending university had benefited their self-

confidence, life satisfaction, mental health, career pathways and wider family. The outcomes of the initial survey, comparing the level before and after attending the University, demonstrated a 30.9% increase in self-confidence and a 25.6% increase in life satisfaction. In addition, 75.6% of students reported that attending the University had helped them in their chosen career path and 68.2% of students reported that attending the University had wider benefits (e.g., for their family).

As part of the analysis of the survey results, we have also compared the results by student characteristics. Findings suggest that white students (compared to Global Majority) and those from disadvantaged neighbourhoods (compared to advantaged) were more likely to benefit in terms of self-confidence and life-satisfaction. Both Global Majority students and those from a disadvantaged neighbourhood reported that attending the University had benefited them more in terms of their career pathway and wider benefits (e.g., family) compared to their counterparts.

	Global Majority	White	IMD 1-2	IMD 3-5
Self-confidence				
Before attending the University	59.5%	45.2%	47.9%	46.4%
After attending the University	89.6%	76.9%	82.0%	75.9%
PP difference	30.1%	31.7%	34.1%	29.5%
Life-satisfaction				
Before attending the University	62.5%	51.9%	52.3%	56.3%
After attending the University	85.7%	79.9%	80.9%	80.4%
PP difference	23.2%	28.0%	28.6%	24.1%

4   Conclusion

This TEF cycle has been one of the most challenging periods that the University, our students and colleagues have faced in its long history. We are immensely proud of the way we responded to the pandemic and the role that we and our students are playing in the recovery. The cost of living crisis is broadening and deepening the problems routinely faced by so many students and yet we have more limited financial resources than many other institutions to provide direct financial support. As always, however, we will work with our students and communities to find innovative and inclusive approaches to supporting our students' success. We are already seeing green shoots of institutional reset from opportunity for all to success for all and we look forward with confidence to celebrating our bicentenary in 2027.

5   References

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