

## Provider Submission | Teaching Excellence Framework 2023

## Context

1. The University of Bedfordshire's vision is to be “A vibrant, ambitious academic community, celebrating diversity and the transformative power of education” (University of Bedfordshire Transforming Bedfordshire Strategic Plan, 2021-26, page 2<sup>i</sup>). Our Education and Student Experience Strategy takes a leading role in the delivery of the University's Strategy; transforming lives through education. We provide access and opportunities for disadvantaged groups at a consistently higher percentage than the sector. Specifically, we provide for learners from our local area (35% v 26% Sector<sup>ii</sup>), from lower socio-economic groups, neighbourhoods with low rates of participation in higher education, from minority ethnic groups under-represented in higher education, and substantially more mature students, as shown in our OfS Size and Shape of Provision dataset<sup>ii</sup> for Full-Time Undergraduate (UG) new entrants (Table 1). The profile of our students is substantially different from the overall higher education sector.

Characteristic	Attribute	University of Bedfordshire					Sector 4-Year Aggregate
		2017	2018	2019	2020	4-Year Aggregate	
Domicile	UK	83%	73%	70%	66%	72%	82%
	EU	9%	21%	17%	26%	19%	6%
	Other International	8%	7%	13%	8%	9%	12%
Age	Under 21 years	41%	29%	29%	26%	31%	72%
	21 to 30 years	30%	35%	34%	38%	35%	18%
	31 years and over	29%	36%	37%	36%	35%	10%
Disability	Reported Disability	8%	7%	6%	6%	7%	14%
	No disability reported/unknown disability type	92%	93%	94%	94%	93%	86%
Ethnicity	Asian	19%	15%	11%	10%	13%	12%
	Black	29%	24%	21%	15%	22%	8%
	Mixed	4%	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%
	Other	2%	3%	2%	3%	2%	2%
	Unknown or not applicable	18%	28%	32%	36%	29%	19%
	White	28%	27%	30%	34%	30%	55%
IMD	Quintile 1	25%	27%	23%	19%	24%	17%
	Quintile 2	25%	20%	20%	20%	21%	16%
	Quintile 3	15%	11%	12%	13%	13%	15%
	Quintile 4	9%	8%	8%	9%	9%	15%
	Quintile 5	7%	5%	5%	6%	5%	16%
	Unknown or not applicable	18%	29%	31%	35%	29%	21%
Free School Meals	Eligible	37%	33%	29%	30%	33%	20%
	Not eligible	63%	67%	71%	70%	67%	80%
ABCS Continuation	Quintile 1	32%	36%	35%	29%	33%	13%
	Quintile 2	31%	32%	32%	36%	33%	22%
Entry Qualifications	Access courses, foundation courses, or other L3 at 65 tariff points or higher	24%	23%	35%	39%	31%	18%
Study Location	Local to address prior to entry	38%	34%	36%	33%	35%	26%

Table 1 Percentage breakdown of attributes of Full-Time (FT) Undergraduate (UG) Entrants at the University of Bedfordshire (UoB) versus the sector, 2017-2020 (from OfS Size and Shape dataset<sup>ii</sup>)

2. With two-thirds of our Full-Time UG students in ABCS Continuation Quintiles 1 and 2, (possessing multiple characteristics known to impact continuation), we are proud of our commitment and success in supporting students to gain access into higher education and achieve success in graduate level employment and/or further study. Thirty one percent in the

4-year aggregate, entered with Access, Foundation or other entry qualifications at 65 UCAS points or higher (Table 1), our students progressed in line with our benchmarked university sector<sup>iii</sup>. This submission demonstrates our delivery of very high quality teaching and learning and provision of appropriate opportunities and experiences for our mix of students, on distinct courses and in partner institutions that enable them to succeed throughout and beyond their studies.

3. We achieved silver in the TEF 2017. Since 2017 we have enhanced and adapted our approaches due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We are proud of how we managed student support during the pandemic, and what our students achieved. We implemented a no-disadvantage policy with emergency measures to provide flexibility in course delivery and assessment that maintained the academic quality required for students to achieve a final award of the equivalent standards of those achieved prior to the pandemic. However, Covid disproportionately affected our students given the proportions of older students with complex lives (with families and needing to work). Post-pandemic we have enhanced our provision; we have tailored, piloted and evaluated interventions aligned to our particular student needs.
4. Significant institutional circumstances including a new senior leadership team, governance structure and strategies, notably during 2020 and 2021, have driven substantial changes to help improve our student outcomes. The new leadership team and governors have acknowledged insufficient focus has been made on students' outcomes in the past and rapid progress has been made since 2021-22. A major institutional change programme is underway. Improvements are evident already from the National Student Survey (NSS) 2022, that show increases in all areas of our student academic experience, and we anticipate this upward trend will continue over time in our other metrics. For example, early indicators from internal data analysis for 2021-22 suggest that a number of actions we have taken to improve our continuation rates are starting to have a beneficial impact on our students as illustrated later in our submission.
5. The University works in partnership with our students to deliver an outstanding education and student experience, with a particularly strong focus on student engagement. The TEF 2023 exercise has been undertaken in collaboration with Bedfordshire Students' Union (BedsSU), who have amplified the student voice through an accompanying TEF 2023 student submission. Our students are at the heart of decision-making processes, being at the centre of key working groups, boards, and working in a variety of student roles as our partners. Our Education and Student Experience Strategy 2022-26 Student Success Framework<sup>iv</sup> illustrates this in Figure 1.

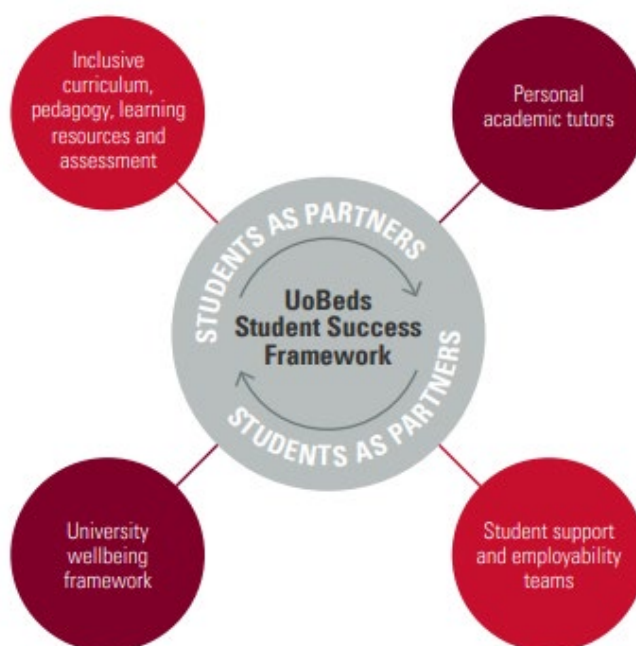


Figure 1 University of Bedfordshire Education and Student Experience Strategy Student Success Framework

6. Our submission focuses on our UK-based, undergraduate (UG) student population, which makes up the majority of our UG provision. Key outcomes for our apprenticeship provision are referred to but not expanded upon, having only started in 2017-18 and with a total of 430 UG apprenticeships in the four-year period 2017-18 to 2020-21. We are fully committed to increasing our degree apprenticeship and Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) offer, building on the successful outcomes to date to provide more flexible delivery modes as detailed in our Apprenticeship Strategy 2022-26. Our Transnational Education (TNE) provision is not part of this submission. Our TNE partners, however, work within the University's Academic Quality Framework and are required to provide a very high quality academic experience commensurate with that of the University's core provision. Our TNE franchised provision follows the same approach as our UK-based franchised courses that are covered within this submission.
7. The demographic and socio-economic indicators of our diverse student body, illustrated in Table 1, along with the differences in our TEF indicators, are highlighted throughout this submission. Across the 4 year aggregate, for Full-Time UG students, approximately 70% are over 21, many of whom have different needs, experiences and preferences for their education and student experience. Equally, our students come from more deprived backgrounds, with 45% of our Full-Time UG entrants from Quintiles 1 and 2 on Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), compared to the sector of 33%. Our student body is also ethnically diverse with a proportion of Black UG entrants of 22% for 2017-2020 almost three times that of the sector (8%). Two-thirds of our entrants (66%) are in ABCS Continuation Quintiles 1 and 2 compared to one-third (35%) for the sector, and 1 in 3 were previously eligible for free school meals (FSM, based on those in the FSM population), compared to 1 in 5 for the sector. Other clear differences are the fewer UK domicile students and students who are 50% less likely to report a disability (shown by Table 1).
8. The notably high proportion of registered students from non-traditional and disadvantaged backgrounds is also manifest in the relatively high proportions of our UG entrants from Access, Foundation or low entry tariffs relative to the sector institutions. Of our UK-domiciled entrants for 2017-2020, only 7% have A' level grades of CDD and above, compared with 36% for the sector<sup>v</sup>. We have successfully grown our mature students against a sector decline, supporting the Governments' proposal to achieve growth in mature student entrants as well as the work of the Office for Students (OfS)<sup>vi</sup> in this area. However, we know that mature students are much less likely to enter university with the traditional A' level background and with that, are more likely to drop out or gain fewer 1<sup>sts</sup> and 2:1s, as shown in the recent headline research from the Nuffield Foundation<sup>vii</sup>. Our Continuation rates are a key priority; to support students to continue with their studies, we have developed evidenced based strategic action plans to target resource and support as detailed within both the Student Experience and Student Outcomes sections of this submission.
9. Additional characteristics of our students not represented in sector metrics nor factored into the benchmark, includes the proportion of our students that work to support their studies or provide care for dependants. In representative data for three consecutive years of running the Beds SU annual survey, the proportion of respondents with childcare responsibilities increased from 36% in 2020 (N=783, UK based undergraduates and postgraduates) to 44% in 2022 (N=721, undergraduates only). Similarly, the four consecutive years of data from the Advance

HE UK Engagement Survey (UKES) demonstrates the significant proportion of our full-time students who provide care for dependants. It also shows that more students work, and work longer hours than other university students to support their studies and families. For example, in 2021 758 respondents reported spending a higher proportion of their non-study time working for pay (66% compared to an average of 50% for all higher education institutions [HEIs] participating in the UKES) and providing care for dependants (62% versus an average of 31% for all participating HEIs). Although this data should be treated as indicative, Advance HE's analysis finds that work commitments beyond ten hours per week negatively impacts student engagement. Our student data indicates that a significant proportion of the University of Bedfordshire students have to deal with multiple factors of disadvantage. This presents a layering of disadvantage that is a necessity for us to deal with and overcome, to ensure students meet their potential and achieve graduate outcomes.

10. These high levels of additional commitments can impact negatively on students' outcomes and the extent to which they can engage with the full range of curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities which the University provides. We offer as much support as we can to ensure students reach their full potential, which is evidenced in our strategies for providing a high quality student experience and improving student outcomes. Two thirds of our students commute considerable distances, evidenced in our Welcome Surveys of new entrants where in 2019 30% (N=594) travel for 30 minutes or more to reach their campus and in 2020 this rose to 46% (N=415), further drawing on their time to fully engage with all teaching and learning activities.
11. Collectively this context provides challenges for learning, teaching and progression at a level that universities as a sector and benchmark are not dealing with. Nevertheless, our part-time and Apprenticeship provision is either broadly in line with the benchmark or materially above in all Student Experience TEF indicators, except for Assessment in our part-time provision that is slightly materially below benchmark. In addition, our full-time provision has improved between 2021 and 2022 in every Student Experience TEF indicator. We are taking great steps to improve all our metrics, and performance in 2022 shows an upward trend. Additionally, our TEF progression indicators alone suggest that we are providing very high teaching quality to achieve our graduate outcomes for our mix of students, with the multiple layers of disadvantage beyond benchmarking factors.

### ***Nature and Extent of Our Provision***

12. The University had a total student headcount of 17,980 in 2020-21, an increase from 12,800 in 2017-18<sup>viii</sup>. Students were studying on courses across four faculties - Creative Arts, Technology and Science (CATS), Education, English and Sport (EES), Health and Social Sciences (HSS) and University of Bedfordshire Business School (UBBS). A large proportion (72%) of our UG students' study at the University's two main campuses in Luton and Bedford, on courses across all four Faculties. In addition, we have a specialist nursing facility located at Stoke Mandeville Hospital in Aylesbury, a Milton Keynes campus delivering courses in CATS and UBBS and Putteridge Bury, Luton, where a small number of courses are taught.
13. A significant proportion of the University's provision is at UG level, accounting for 74.7% of student headcount in 2020-21 and 78.9% for the four-year period. Within the UG provision, 89% of students were full-time in 2020-21, an increase from 81% in 2017-18. Overall, 84.5% of UG students were full-time over the four-year period and 15.5% of students were part-time,

including students completing a proportion of their course part-time whilst registered on a full-time course. The sizable growth in student numbers over the TEF period, was largely due to the establishment of a new UK partnership. As an extension of our mission to widen access and participation, in 2016-17 we initiated a significant partnership with the London School of Commerce (LSC), opening study centres in Birmingham and London and later expanding this provision to Milton Keynes. This partnership is specifically with HSS and UBBS and through a tailored foundation year programme. UK student numbers grew from 750 (headcount) in 2017-18 to over 3000 (headcount) in 2020-21, accounting for 23.1% of the total UG provision. We also have a number of partnerships with local specialist institutions and further education colleges at 6% of our provision.

### ***Strategic Vision & Ambitions for Transforming Bedfordshire and Student Lives***

14. Our Transforming Bedfordshire Strategy 2021-2026 is underpinned by six enabling strategies: Education and Student Experience; Research and Innovation; Partnership and External Engagement; People and Culture; Internationalisation; and Infrastructure. Each working to five Super Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), four of which relate to improving student experience and student outcomes: Recruitment, Continuation, Attainment Gap, Student Satisfaction and Graduate Outcomes.
15. Our Access and Participation Plan (APP) is fully embedded in our University Strategy, as is Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, alongside the Race Equality Charter where we are currently working towards our institutional submission for Charter status in 2024. The University's collective work in this area is central to our strategies and leadership, and reflects our commitment to our diverse student population.

## **Embedding Outstanding Academic Experience and Assessment (SE1-3)**

16. The University's Education and Student Experience Strategy 2022-2026, p.3 has five strategic goals and priorities: 1) Teaching and Assessment; 2) Co-and Extra-Curricular Experience; 3) Thrive, to enable students to thrive academically and personally; 4) Success, to enable student opportunity and to achieve their best degree outcomes and graduate level employment; and 5) Sustainability, to contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, there are five Strategic Action Plans to deliver on Student Experience and Student Outcomes, each evaluated with our University-wide framework, using the Theory of Change Model (ToC).

### ***Inspiring Teaching, Course Content and Delivery (SE1&2)***

17. We believe on-campus engagement is essential to building learning communities and to deliver practical elements of the curriculum to help deliver Student Outcomes. Our 14 academic schools, across the four faculties, primarily deliver courses in person and on campus, however we have taken steps to enhance the provision of blended learning in response to positive student feedback and practices developed throughout the pandemic. All units are thus, eligible to embed a maximum number of 'digital hours' to enable an on campus



delivery to be enhanced by digital teaching and learning. This approach supports students with multiple commitments to study at a time that suits their needs.

18. Overall, institutional student experience results notably improved in all NSS 2022 question areas, including a 4% improvement for Overall Satisfaction against a sector increase of 0.9%. Teaching on My Course for the overall four-year aggregate indicator (see Table 2) is broadly in line with benchmark for full-time and apprenticeship students, and materially above benchmark for part-time students. We were pleased to see the improvements across all modes of delivery following the impact of the pandemic.

Teaching on My Course	Year 1 NSS 2019	Year 2 NSS 2020	Year 3 NSS 2021	Year 4 NSS 2022	4-Year Aggregate Indicator	4-Year Aggregate Benchmark	Relationship to TEF benchmark
Full-Time	83.7%	79.9%	77.8%	79.9%	80.5%	82.0%	Broadly in line
Part-Time	93.5%	83.9%	82.7%	92.9%	88.9%	85.1%	Materially above
Apprenticeship	[none]	[low]	79.2%	81.9%	83.5%	84.2%	Broadly in line

Table 2 UoB Student Experience indicators for Teaching on my Course (from OfS Student Experience Taught or Registered (TorR) workbook, September 2022).

19. We achieve outstanding teaching quality which is research-informed, through applying a range of teaching approaches, innovative practice, and curriculum models tailored to the subject area, within our overarching curriculum framework (CRe8) shown in Figure 2. CRe8 enables our curriculum to inspire our students through an explicit emphasis on personalised learning; an innovative and challenging curriculum informed by research, scholarship and professional practice; realistic learning; employability; and assessment, to tailor and support students learning, progression and attainment.



Figure 2 CRe8 Curriculum Framework

20. Originally introduced in 2008 and updated in 2014, our curriculum framework is going through a further staff and student review in 2022-23. CRe8 acts as a primary tool to inform course design, curriculum review and enhancement activities and was praised by the Panel in the 2017 TEF submission. It was based on many aspects of good practice across the sector in contemporary pedagogy highlighted in HEA reports<sup>ix</sup>. We co-create the curriculum with our partners to ensure that our courses meet the needs of students studying in partner institutions.

21. In light of the imperative to make improvements to our Student Outcomes, as a precursor to the University Curriculum Framework review in 2022-23, the University instigated a Curriculum Change Programme in April 2022. The Curriculum Change Programme brings alive all pathways of CRe8 across every level of our courses, in three strands of work: employability; an inclusive curriculum; and students' wellbeing. Together, these are to improve Continuation, Completion and Progression. Specifically, the Curriculum Change Programme embeds:

- 1) Work-related and work-based learning; career readiness / advancement; and key course-related graduate competencies, at every level of every course, informed by sector reviews and practice.
- 2) Equality, diversity and inclusivity in the curriculum, informed by Advance HE<sup>x</sup> and the UUK-NUS #ClosingtheGap Report (2019)<sup>xi</sup> and tailored to the University through consultation with academic staff, the Students' Union and wider student body.
- 3) Student well-being, reflecting our strategic commitment to promoting and prioritising student mental well-being and work towards our Mental Health Charter<sup>xii</sup> status in 2023.

### ***Engaging, current, relevant and challenging learning opportunities (SE2&3).***

22. Through CRe8 (Realistic Learning strand) the University has embedded active learning and a learning experience that is meaningful, challenging and inclusive for all students. Additionally, faculties and schools have developed subject aligned pedagogic philosophies and effective approaches to provide tailored support for student learning. For example, culturally sustaining pedagogy (School of Applied Social Science), relational and critical pedagogy (School of Society, Community and Health) and UBBS embedding holistic learning through faculty-wide teaching, learning and student experience dimensions. Our interdisciplinary night-time mock crime scene event also illustrates this, bringing together students from a range of disciplines - paramedics, forensic scientists, police officers and journalists - to experience the reality of the environment and working relationships they can expect to encounter in their future career; captured within the student Testimonial 1. The effectiveness of these approaches is evident in our NSS results showing annual increases for the last 3 years in student satisfaction questions about their Learning Opportunities – with results broadly in line with our Office for Students benchmark.

*Professional Policing student: It was really vital in helping me to understand the difference between theory and practice. Coming to an event like this allows you to put everything you've learnt into practice and get a good idea of what it feels like in the 'real' world.*

*Testimonial 1 Student feedback on engaging learning opportunities*

### ***Inspiring students through education for sustainability and 'going global' (SE2)***

23. The University is committed to supporting the delivery of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and education for sustainability as one of our Strategic Goals. To enable this, CRe8 (Curriculum strand) highlights the importance of developing local and global perspectives on environmental and social sustainability issues in subjects.

Education for sustainability, designed by our Sustainability Forum, has been recognised by QAA/Advance HE and the UK University Climate Network<sup>xiii</sup>, an example of our staff research informing teaching. Our curriculum responds to good sector practice (QAA/Advance HE, 2021)<sup>xiv</sup> and national survey's conducted by the NUS and via our student feedback asking for greater links to global and local challenges in their course. Since 2016, education for

sustainability at Bedfordshire has scored more than 95% by the People and Planet University Green League. This is reflected in the University's top twenty position since 2016 and our second place ranking in its 2022-23 audit and report.

24. Students have other international curricular and extra-curricular activities such as through Go Global and Erasmus Schemes, and now the Turing Scheme, 2021. Over 1,300 students participated in Go Global up to July 2019. As part of the Turing Scheme, Health and Social Sciences students visited the University of Gothenburg's Social Work Department to experience lectures and attend social work settings across the city during 2021-22. This had a positive impact on students, as illustrated by staff Testimonial 2.

*"As a course team, we are excited that our students have this opportunity to experience learning and life in a different country, while gaining knowledge about the health and social care system." "By linking the trip to a graded piece of work, they will be able to see the result of their efforts with the grades they receive."*

*Testimonial 2 Staff comments on the Turing Scheme opportunity*

25. Post-covid we have been concentrating on online opportunities for students to gain international experiences connected with their course, which is better suited to a large proportion of our students who have other responsibilities preventing them from overseas travel. Such opportunities include online internships with Mindless Academy, and the Global Leadership Forum with Common Purpose. We continue to expand such activities to enable us to provide these experiences to a large number of students, due to evidence of impact. Students completing a self-assessment questionnaire at the end of the Mindless Academy Digital Internship reported positive increases in self-confidence, digital skills and transitioning into the world of work.

### **Research and student academic experience (SE3)**

26. Our CRe8 curriculum framework highlights the importance of learning through research, scholarship and professional practice. Research informed teaching is supported through research active staff aligned to the University's nine research institutes which map to our Faculty and School subject areas. For example, The Centre for Research in English Language Learning and Assessment (CRELLA) ranked 3<sup>rd</sup> out of 92 submissions in the English unit of assessment, in the Faculty of Education, English and Sport, which informs our English language learning, teaching and assessment. Students have a variety of opportunities to join in with staff research communities to enhance their learning, such as in the Institute for Sport and Physical Activity Research (ISPAR) which runs an annual conference and seminar series for staff and students. Our researchers in the Institute of Health Research have produced world leading impact in a range of areas impacting the life course from pre-conception, maternal health, child health, to healthy ageing, end of life care and organ donation. This research is central to our innovative public health teaching that enhances the student experience by ensuring the principles of applied research are embedded into our curriculum. Overall, 60% of the University's research and 50% of its impact was judged to be world-leading or internationally excellent by the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021<sup>xv</sup>.
27. Students benefit from internally funded staff and student research projects. Students are employed through our University Educational Research Award fund that supports research that enhances student experience and student outcomes. These projects employ student-



researchers working with staff. Projects include: enhancing the curriculum in business courses through creative use of authentic assessments; assessing the effectiveness of curriculum in Health and Social Care UG courses; and promoting belonging across teaching, learning and student experience. Students and staff present their findings and recommendations at our annual Learning and Teaching Excellence Conference.

### ***Enriching the student experience through employer engagement (SE3)***

28. Each Faculty has Employer Advisory Board to ensure all courses keep up-to-date with sector developments and changes. Boards advise on: overall industrial trends; how these affect employment prospects; the design of paid student placements/ internships; joint research opportunities; and specific course content to improve student outcomes. We also work closely with industry experts and 32 Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) when developing our courses and routinely integrate employer engagement, work experience and subject scholarship in our provision, all contributing to an outstanding student academic experience. The University has established onsite work experience settings to facilitate students to gain professional practice, such as:
  - A Sports Therapy and Rehabilitation Clinic: allows students to work with clients under the supervision of qualified practitioners, in addition to 400 hours of practice placement in a range of different settings, to meet PSRB requirements.
  - A Radio LaB: that allows students to gain experience presenting or producing radio shows on our award-winning community radio station. We have won awards at the Community Radio Awards every year between 2019-2022.
  - Business Analytics Suite – to primarily support Business and Computing students in data analytics, 'big-data', data mining, Digital Marketing, and other management skills needed in today's workplace.
29. Students can gain valuable upskilling and career development opportunities through year-round placement opportunities. We offer over 140 courses with the option to take a professional practice year (PPY) in the third year of studies. These may be voluntary or paid placements. We provide a financial bursary for students who are not paid, to reduce inequalities of access to placement opportunities. A PPY does not suit all students, which further reinforces our approach to embed work-based learning as well as work-related learning in our curriculum (detailed in paragraph 21), so that we are assured that all students gain high quality employability experiences. For example, Human Resource Management students in Milton Keynes benefit from a semester long placement with notable local companies including Railtrack and many recruitment and search agencies based in the local areas. Academics also work closely with our central Research and Innovation Team so that students can work on live consultancy projects. In Business courses alone, c60 academics have engaged with this over the last three years.
30. Courses are delivered with employer-related visits, with additional activities prioritising Level 6 students, to enable students to network with employers and gain extra work experience before they graduate. Examples of employers' students have engaged with include: the English Football Association's National Football Centre; DHL Air UK based in East Midlands Airport and Midland Air Museum; Royal Military Academy; and Unilever Research & Development European Headquarters. Course leaders also regularly invite industry speakers or artists with expertise in their field to further engage with our students.

Students can gain further valuable upskilling and career development opportunities through year-round placement opportunities – both voluntary and paid- for example, as seen with our employer engagement with the local rugby club's charity in Testimonial 3.

*“The opportunity to continue to benefit from the facilities at the Bedford campus as sponsors of the new Sports Coaching & Development course is exciting, and to have additional support of student researchers and volunteers will both support their learning and enhance the quality of our programmes.”*

*Testimonial 3: Head of the Blues Foundation (Local rugby club's charity)*

## Assessment and Feedback (SE1)

31. The overall institutional Assessment and Feedback results for full-time and part-time provision improved in NSS 2022 following the impact of the pandemic in Years 2 and 3 (Table 3). Pre-Covid, we were in line with our benchmark and are pleased to be making progress back towards our benchmark. Through our effective assessment and feedback practices, we support students' learning, progression and attainment that is reflected in our high Progression rates. The University programme of assessment and moderation is followed for our partnership provision. Student assessments are available for external examiners to sample and review, who consistently confirm that teaching and assessment is effective and that standards are appropriately established and maintained. This is monitored through Academic Board.

Assessment and Feedback	Year 1 NSS 2019	Year 2 NSS 2020	Year 3 NSS 2021	Year 4 NSS 2022	4-Year Aggregate Indicator	4-Year Aggregate Benchmark	Relationship to TEF benchmark
Full-Time	72.8%	68.8%	67.6%	69.3%	69.8%	72.7%	Materially below
Part-Time	85.4%	78.2%	71.5%	86.1%	81.0%	83.9%	Materially below
Apprenticeship	[none]	[low]	85.4%	81.5%	85.5%	80.4%	Materially above

*Table 3 UoB Student Experience indicators for Assessment and Feedback (from OfS Student Experience TorR workbook, September 2022)*

32. Our CRe8 Assessment strand, includes the need for clearly articulated assessment criteria and briefs, authentic assessments that support the development of graduate employability, and the provision of high-quality feedback to our students. Accordingly, standard assignment brief templates are adopted across the University. This ensures that all students receive assignment details, instructions and marking guidance as they progress throughout their course. Our approach to monitoring and enhancement of assessment practices will be reviewed in our assessment journey project - paragraph 35.

33. Likewise, for Feedback, the University uniformly adopts a 2Q Feedback process. This involves both feedback related to i) how well assessment criteria was addressed and ii) feed-forward on what a student should do to enhance performance in related activity in the future, we receive positive feedback from students on our approach, as illustrated in Testimonial 4. The 2Q Feedback process ensures a consistent approach to assessment feedback and that students receive clear and concise guidance.

*“The staff have taken the time to recognise my learning style and feedback on assignments has enabled me to do better. Staff are also easy to talk to with regard to getting advice on how to go about new writing techniques and get to know you on a personal level as well as academic which makes you feel at ease”. (NSS 2019 – Applied Social Studies Student)*

*Testimonial 4 Student feedback on academic support and assessment feedback*

34. To further enhance our Feedback process, UBBS and HSS faculties co-led an 'achievement explained' project<sup>xvi</sup> in 2017 which has since informed feedback guidance provided to students in welcome week and incrementally across levels. To improve perceptions of fair marking and assessment we are being more explicit in explaining our assessments and our approach to students. For example, excellence is illustrated through a pilot in HSS 2022-23, using both assessment briefs and a screencast/vodcast/other accessible permanent medium from the unit outset, to inform university-wide roll out. This is to explain the assessment tasks and marking criteria both in advance and as a permanent resource for students to refer to throughout their units and assessments.
35. In addition, the University Assessment Journey Project takes an holistic review of policy and practice. This includes the updating of our policy to enable changes in practice post-pandemic, a full review of assessment regulations, and alignment to our new strategic priorities, including full integration with our Curriculum Change Programme. The University is also currently investing £5m to enhance our student record system and the processes it supports to transform our assessment recording infrastructure.

## Resources, support and student engagement (SE 4-7)

### ***Staff professional development and embedding of academic practice (SE4)***

36. The University's Academy for Learning and Teaching Excellence leads the development and enhancement of our academic community to champion best practice, provide support, training and development as well as recognition for learning, teaching and educational research practice. This includes the co-design and collaborative delivery of critical staff dialogues on approaches to equality, diversity and inclusivity; digital learning systems; course leadership; communities of practice; and our Sustainability Forum, which has been recognised by Advance HE with a Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence<sup>xvii</sup>. The Academy coordinates the Professional Teaching Scheme, supporting staff to work towards Advance HE fellowships. The University is accredited to award Associate Fellowship, Fellowship and Senior Fellowship via our Experiential Portfolio Route and we offer support for direct applications to Advance HE for PFHEA. Staff can also undertake a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching in Higher Education, with FHEA status. Our most recent report from Advance HE indicates that the percentage of teaching staff with fellowship recognition at the University is nearly 20% above the sector average of 46.1%, with currently 65.1%. Our target is 80% as part of our strategy to develop our staff resource to continue to provide a high quality student experience. Additionally, 54 staff are currently participating in the Experiential Portfolio Route and 18 staff enrolled on the PgCert.
37. Advance HE recognition as a criterion is built into our University academic promotion pathways. The Teaching and Student Academic Experience promotion pathway includes Associate Professor (FHEA / SFHEA) and Professor (PFHEA), introduced in 2022-23 to recognise the outstanding academic practice of staff. Successful recipients will provide mentorship for future applicants. The University currently has three National Teaching Fellows, two of which routinely lead institutional teaching and learning enhancement such as the review of CRe8 and assessment journey project, both discussed in SE1-3.

38. Staff continuous professional development includes our peer support of teaching scheme which is inclusive of taught session observations and peer review of learning materials. Staff are also supported through a wide range of training programmes and events such as Advance HE Aurora and an Academic Leadership Enhancement Programme for Heads of School. The University's annual Learning and Teaching Excellence Conference provides a forum to share and disseminate best practices. To ensure equity of provision, colleagues from our UK-based partners are invited to this conference, and the University's Academy for Learning and Teaching participates in professional development days for Partner staff. Academic development needs are identified through for example, Performance Development Reviews (PDRs), conference evaluation, and staff and student survey data. Testimonial 5 illustrates how staff development has had a direct impact on student academic experiences:

*"As part of my Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice [PGCert] I devised a self-assessment form which I still use today. I believe that awareness of assessment criteria (which is a major part of the self-assessment form) has an impact on student satisfaction".*

*Testimonial 5 Staff feedback regarding impact of academic development*

39. The University also has established staff networks that provide additional support for staff to achieve very high quality teaching, feedback and assessment practices. Our Race Equality Network, LGBTQ+ Alliance, Women's Network and the Disability Network, support the University's ambitions of providing an inclusive experience for all staff and students. LGBTQ+ Alliance representatives have championed the University's participation in the Stonewall Workplace Equality Index survey and the Staff Disability Network have collaborated with the Students' Union and Student Support Teams to champion the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Scheme. Such activities directly enhance our student's academic experiences.

### **Supportive learning environment and academic support (SE5)**

40. The University's Education and Student Experience Strategy 2022-2026 evidences our commitment and approach to providing a supportive learning environment. With 35% of our students being over 30, many with part-time jobs and caring responsibilities, we have shaped our offer to enable flexibility in accessing course teams and student services. During the Covid pandemic we expanded remote academic support including online tutorials and academic skills training and writing support (detailed to follow). Nonetheless, there was a reduction in academic support satisfaction (see Table 4) which we attribute to the impact of the pandemic on access to in-person support and increased study challenges. This is evidenced in our Covid-19 Survey<sup>xviii</sup> undertaken in June 2020 with 2306 respondents, where the majority of students responded that they found learning from home challenging. A third of those stated that this was due to having children at home and not having enough space to study. NSS 2022 shows an improvement for all modes of delivery, with particularly high satisfaction for part-time students (92.4%), where we know many choose the part-time route so they have more time to juggle academic study and other commitments, than with a full-time course.

Academic Support	Year 1 NSS 2019	Year 2 NSS 2020	Year 3 NSS 2021	Year 4 NSS 2022	4-Year Aggregate Indicator	4-Year Aggregate Benchmark	Relationship to TEF benchmark
Full-Time	78.2%	74.4%	68.3%	70.6%	72.9%	76.8%	Materially below
Part-Time	87.9%	81.9%	78.2%	92.4%	85.5%	81.3%	Materially above
Apprenticeship	[none]	[low]	73.6%	77.9%	79.8%	78.8%	Broadly in line

*Table 4 UoB Student Experience- Academic Support (OfS Student Experience TorR workbook, September 2022)*

### ***Personal Academic Tutoring (SE5)***

41. Students have a dedicated Personal Academic Tutor who provides tailored support aligned to individual needs. This includes a choice of in-person or online meetings to ensure accessibility. Our Personal Academic Tutoring was positively featured in the Students' Union 2022 survey. Eighty nine percent of students who met their Personal Academic Tutor reported that they were able to help them either directly or by signposting them to appropriate support. However, uptake of personal academic tutoring was lower (55.5%) than expected, particularly amongst IMD Quintiles 1-3 compared to IMD Quintiles 4-5. We are focusing efforts on enhancing our tutorial system as part of our drive to increase Continuation rates. We implemented improvements to our personal academic tutor system 2022-23, introducing a new recording and referral system, designed to streamline and support tutor referrals to specialist support teams and improve data capture. Staff training and resources were also enhanced, as was our student Personal Academic Tutor Guide. We also have two institution centrally funded research projects to help understand how we can increase student update with their Tutor and to understand alternative support options. One project also focuses on tutoring for students on our part-time Applied Education course, who have a non-conventional study pattern.

### ***Support for academic skills and writing (SE5)***

42. Study Hub teams provide comprehensive academic skills support (including writing, information literacy, maths, study skills, computer skills), in person in Luton and Bedford Libraries as well as online for our wider UK-based provision. Targeted developmental sessions are provided to support students with different needs: students on placements who may be unable to access drop-ins; students starting their studies or at transition points in their study; those needing more support entering with non-traditional backgrounds and qualifications). In 2021-22, 459 targeted academic and computer skills workshops were delivered which resulted in over 5000 interactions with students. In 2021-22 the Study Hub had 5580 interactions with 819 unique students. The percentage of students accessing Study Hub from IMD Quintiles 1 and 2 (42.4%) was broadly in line with the percentage of our students from this population (45%). Study Hub teams are highly valued by teaching staff and students, illustrated in Testimonial 6:

*"Study Hub Team played a significant role in facilitating achievement of learning outcomes"*  
*"The study hub team has been amazing and supported me throughout my degree."*  
*((Nursing Lecturer and NSS 2019 comment)).*

*Testimonial 6 Staff and student feedback related to Study Hub*

43. The Centre for English as a Foreign Language provides additional pre-sessional and in-session provision, accredited by the British Council, for international students. Pass rates on pre-sessional courses rose from 84% in 2020-21 (all delivered online) to 93% in 2021-22 (mostly delivered on campus). For 2022-23 in Semester 1 only, cohort 1 is 98% and cohort 2 is 100% (all taught on campus). The Centre's in-session Academic Skills Training unit, aims to support the adjustment of new international students to higher education studies in the UK. Students are guided through a structured programme of topics relating to academic skills, British university culture and effective communication. This opportunity is offered very widely; 1651 students in 2020-21, 3123 in 2021-22 and to 2261 in 2022-23 (Semester 1 figures). Bedfordshire Unit Survey results indicate high satisfaction with both pre-sessional and in-session provision. Feedback from our most recent British Council inspection in 2018 cited



26 strengths in the Centre for English as a Foreign Language provision (a significant improvement on the 11 strengths highlighted in 2014).

44. Student feedback has guided our current practice. For example, students told us they wanted more guidance on how to write and structure assignments. In addition to our Study Hub drop-in service, the University invested in Studiosity in 2020 to help increase Continuation rates. Students can upload a draft assignment and receive specialist feedback within 24 hours on their English writing skills (not subject content). The flexibility afforded by Studiosity complements existing support and expands access to support. Student feedback has been incredibly positive which has led to the University rolling out Studiosity to all UK-based main site students from 2021-22. Student satisfaction remained high, with 99.9% satisfaction reported from 2079 students between September 2021 and May 2022. University staff research on student use of Studiosity<sup>xix</sup> found that using the system enhanced students' confidence in academic writing. Developing students' confidence is part of our approach for educational gain described in SO4-6. Turnitin complements Studiosity in terms of providing 'point of need' and flexible access to sources of formative feedback, used for students to review assignments before submission. Further University research is being carried out to establish how Turnitin can best develop our students' academic writing.

### ***Physical and virtual learning resources (SE6)***

45. The University has made significant investments (over £100m) to enhance our campuses, including: a new Milton Keynes Campus building; new Aylesbury Campus building; Luton Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) building; Luton Library; Luton Art and Design building; Gateway Building in Bedford. The University ensures students have access to outstanding learning environments tailored to their subject areas. Examples include:
- CATS: Media Arts Centre, STEM labs, Art and Design Studio, Professional Theatre, RadioLab.
  - UBBS: Moot Court, Business Pods;
  - EES: Forest School, Sports Sciences Labs;
  - HSS: Healthcare Suite.

Testimonial 7 illustrates how specialist learning spaces are highly valued:

*"STEM will provide all the necessary needs for engineering students" (NSS 2022).  
 "I like that there's different areas based on your learning. I can go to a floor with a friend and talk about our course... if I want to have some silent learning... I can go to the silent floor. There's many resources too and I know others on my course love the library too".  
 (Library survey 2021 - Level 6 student).*

*Testimonial 7 Student feedback related to specialist learning spaces*

46. The University has four libraries and/or learning resource centres (Luton [RIBA East Award winner in 2018], Bedford, Aylesbury and Milton Keynes). The library team adopts a digital first purchase policy to maximise access to our resource collection, ensuring that resources are available in appropriate formats and quantities to ensure equitable access. Library collections currently consist of 250,000+ books, 160,000+ e-books and almost 150,000 e-journals, supporting 2072 reading lists. The Library team have held the Customer Service Excellence Award since 2016, reflected by Testimonial 8.

*“Customers and partners universally praised the customer-centric behaviour of staff who are passionate about delivering services that meet customer needs”.*

*Testimonial 8 Customer Service Excellence Assessor Report 2022*

47. All subject areas have a dedicated Academic Liaison Librarian who provides subject based information literacy support. This includes in-unit sessions related to library induction, information literacy and referencing. In 2021-22, Academic Liaison Librarians delivered 272 sessions involving 5209 student interactions. Given the demographic of our students, Luton Library is open 24/7 and Bedford library opening hours are extended to times students most need access (informed by Students' Union and building access data). We have 469 open access PCs located on all levels of our libraries, Macs along with a laptop loan scheme.
48. During the pandemic we increased our laptop loan capacity to support students who did not have access to home PC (delivering laptops to private accommodation where needed). However, students had restricted access to campuses during Covid-19, and therefore, many campus specialist learning resources could not be accessed, as evidenced in our Covid-19 survey, 2020, and inferred in NSS results in Table 5. Prior to the pandemic we scored highly in Learning Resources and a drop in scores corresponds with reduced campus access. NSS 2022 starts the reverse of this trend with all Learning Resources scores increased. Access to resources to support learning remains a priority area of work.

Learning Resources	Year 1 NSS 2019	Year 2 NSS 2020	Year 3 NSS 2021	Year 4 NSS 2022	4-Year Aggregate Indicator	4-Year Aggregate Benchmark	Relationship to TEF benchmark
Full-Time	87.2%	81.4%	74.6%	76.8%	80.1%	82.2%	Broadly in line
Part-Time	81.2%	74.5%	74.5%	85.1%	79.1%	81.6%	Broadly in line
Apprenticeship	[none]	[low]	83.3%	83.6%	86.5%	80.7%	Materially above

*Table 5 UoB Student Experience indicators for Learning Resources (from OfS Student Experience TorR workbook, September 2022)*

49. All students have access to the University's Virtual Learning Environment called BREO (Bedfordshire Resources for Education Online). Each unit of study has a corresponding BREO shell which is structured to ensure that there is a consistent institutional approach to providing unit information, learning and teaching materials, assessment submission, reading lists, course team information and communication with cohorts of students. Over the last three years the University has been working to remove virtual barriers to learning, and to respond to the Office for Students' Gravity Assist Review on ensuring digital access. Our students have a number of challenges, being equipped to learn digitally and finding time and study spaces for learning. Access is a core focus of our Virtual Learning Environment and we have upgraded BREO to BlackBoard Ultra to better support access. The University has also developed a new methodology to assess the nature of students' digital access and preparedness<sup>xx</sup> providing direct evidence of students' methods of access cross referenced against student demographics (such as IMD and location). This has given us key insight into the types of pedagogy that can be developed post-Covid and to enhance opportunities for students to engage in digital assessment and digital success.
50. We utilise BlackBoard's ALLY system tool to enhance its accessibility, particularly for our students with multiple pressures on time. This has enabled students to automatically convert content into formats best suited to their needs, such as into an MP3. The ALLY system examined nearly 680,000 items within our Virtual Learning Environment reporting the total accessibility of 82.4%, and 280,000 individual downloads of alternative content. Furthermore, the University implemented a £150,000 project to re-equip rooms within the institution from

2021-22, to enable live recordings in lectures and seminar sessions, to be uploaded to the Virtual Learning Environment. We have tailored our activities so that students are able to re-watch and re-play content from the classroom online in accessible formats to enable students to study around their busy lives.

### ***Embedding engagement with students, leading to continuous improvement in experience and outcomes (SE7)***

51. NSS results over the last four years indicate that actions to improve engagement with students are showing improvements in student satisfaction following a post pandemic reduction. Performance in all questions across Student Voice improved in 2022. The 4-Year Aggregate indicator for Part-Time students is materially above benchmark, with the split indicator for Part-Time Year 4 being +11.3 percentage points above benchmark. Our Apprenticeships provision is similarly materially above benchmark, with a 13.4% increase between 2021 and 2022 as in Table 6. We have an institutional approach for Student Voice and Co-Creation that has undergone further enhancements as follows.

Student Voice	Year 1 NSS 2019	Year 2 NSS 2020	Year 3 NSS 2021	Year 4 NSS 2022	4-Year Aggregate Indicator	4-Year Aggregate Benchmark	Relationship to TEF benchmark
Full-Time	72.0%	68.5%	62.7%	67.9%	68.0%	72.6%	Materially below
Part-Time	76.9%	60.4%	60.7%	83.0%	71.0%	67.7%	Materially above
Apprenticeship	[none]	[low]	65.3%	78.7%	77.7%	73.0%	Materially above

*Table 6 UoB Student Experience indicators for Student Voice (from OfS Student Experience TorR workbook, September 2022)*

### ***Institutionalising Student Voice and Co-creation (SE7)***

52. The University and Students' Union work closely in partnership as headlined in our Context. We work with students to ensure a very high quality student academic experience and student outcomes. We have a range of strategies to embed student engagement and student voice. CRe8 Realistic Learning strand highlights the significance of collaboration and the need to involve students in the co-creation of their learning. Prior to the pandemic an institutional Peer Assisted Learning scheme was in place, highlighted as good practice by the TEF Panel in 2017. We have moved to a Students as Partner model using Student Experience Leaders, informed by staff research<sup>xxi</sup> that showed this model of student leadership helped to enhance students' perceptions of their workplace and career competencies, aligning with our approach to educational gains. Students work with staff and other students, leading a wide range of student experience enhancement projects. Students work as co-creators of our curriculum, as student researchers on targeted teaching and learning projects, as student consultants about their student experience, as well as in the University-wide student representation roles.
53. Excellent practice of student engagement is evident in our Student Voice Principles and Framework, jointly owned and administered by the University and Students' Union. This Framework uses an easily defined and recognised '3 ways to provide feedback' approach: 1) online, 2) through a Course or School Representative ('rep'), and 3) in a meeting/class. This approach arose from student voice, where students wanted a clearer way to provide feedback and one that accommodated the preferences of our diverse student body. It also provides a consistent institutional approach to providing opportunities to share and act on feedback. The University uses three types of student representative: Course Representatives; School Representatives; and through the Students' Union Sabbatical Officers. The different feedback mechanisms enable students to feedback on their student academic journey as well as wider

student experiences. We are working together with our Students' Union to achieve strong student representations for all our courses.

54. Student feedback on courses and units of study are collected in a number of ways, including the Bedfordshire Unit Survey (BUS). University Link Coordinators ensure that student feedback is heard at our partner institutions and feedback into our Portfolio Executive Committees. All partners follow the University processes for unit level surveys, unless an alternative arrangement has been approved by the Teaching Quality and Standards Committee. In addition to the end-point Unit Survey we have an in-unit exercise, requiring course teams to undertake a feedback exercise while a unit is running to identify and feedback both on points of good practice and for improvement.
55. In addition to the BUS and NSS, the University has undertaken the UK Engagement Survey (UKES) and Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) and will administer the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) in 2023. These results are used collectively by course teams and faculty leadership to inform course enhancement planning and faculty annual monitoring reports. Students and/or their representatives therefore have opportunities to engage in formal and informal meetings about the continuous improvement of their student experience and outcomes. The NSS 2022 of +6% from NSS 2021, suggests our student voice mechanisms are improving. Students receive feedback via 'you said – we are listening and responding' campaigns to show how student voice has informed enhancements to students' academic experiences. Recent campaigns include: investing in Studiosity to increase support for academic writing development; expansion of laptop loan provision; improvements to on-campus specialist spaces (e.g. new multi-use games arena); working with the Students' Union to provide feedback opportunities; and a new Graduate Support Package, to provide guidance and tools students need for their future employment.

## Student Outcomes (SO1-3)

### ***Effective approaches to ensure students succeed and progress beyond their studies: continuation, completion and progression (SO1-3)***

56. Our strategies and approaches to improve student experience, impact on student outcomes, and directly support students to succeed in their studies. Therefore, this section is a more focused account of the extent to which our students succeed in and beyond their studies, and in the educational gains we deliver; it is to be viewed along with the totality of evidence in the submission. We have identified where our priorities need to be made to improve student experience and student outcomes. This includes our commitment to make improvements through evidenced-based practice, and institutional investment to fund key educational research. Two projects specifically relating to Continuation and Completion are Belong@Beds and our personal academic tutor system.
57. Our Continuation data in Table 7 shows a decline in the 4 TEF Years, which aligns with an increase in student numbers of mature students and those entering via a Foundation Year (FY), which is attracting more mature students from non-traditional routes into university. This brings with it multiple layers of disadvantage as detailed in paragraph 11. The majority of growth during that time was in our Business and Management courses that were considerably

materially below benchmark for Continuation, including those on a first degree with an integrated Foundation Year. As our largest subject cohort, this has had a significant impact on the University's overall Continuation indicator, and is where we are placing considerable efforts. Analysis of our internal surveys (Welcome Surveys, Unit Surveys, Student Voice Feedback, SU Surveys) along with National data on our student body (NSS, TEF and Office for Students data sets) enables us to identify our challenges with Continuation, beyond our benchmarked characteristics, pointing to the intersectionality of the majority of our students that helps to explain our TEF Continuation data and actions to improve them. To address Continuation in Business and Management courses, a number of key actions outline our approach to support students to succeed in their studies, these include:

- Faculty re-structure to rebalance the portfolio in Schools to better deliver the significant increase in Foundation Year provision, and the increased complexity of delivering courses across distributed campuses and study centres;
- Re-design of the Foundation Year in 2021, to prepare students for degree level study, directly addressing issues of retention, continuation and transition points Level 3-4;
- Learnings from the Foundation Year re-design, and building on positive focus group feedback, integrated into the Business and Management UG Periodic Review 2022-23;
- A range of Teaching and Learning Enhancement activities aligned to metrics;
- Implementation of a Business School pilot Success Intervention Team to better support 'at risk' students;
- Improvements in Personal Academic Tutoring and Student Leadership roles based on evaluation and feedback from the Success Intervention Team.

58. The Success Intervention Team of Success Coordinators and administrators in 2021-22, supported students with complex needs, to bridge Faculty and wider University support teams, and to identify students at risk before they reached 'crisis point' with their progression. In 2021-22 483 students were supported. Eighty two students had enhanced Individual Learning Plans and weekly support, including group support workshops held outside of scheduled learning. Success was shown through an increased level of understanding of student needs to inform on-going actions, with a proposal to develop a permanent solution.

Continuation	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	4-Year Aggregate Indicator	4-Year Aggregate Benchmark	Relationship to TEF benchmark
Full-Time	74.3%	72.7%	70.1%	68.2%	70.9%	84.9%	Materially below
Part-Time	77.8%	86.4%	89.1%	85.2%	84.5%	78.3%	Materially above
Apprenticeship	[none]	[none]	87.9%	88.2%	88.0%	90.8%	Materially below

Table 7 UoB Continuation indicators (from OfS Student Experience TorR workbook, September 2022).

59. For our part-time students, we are notably and materially above benchmark (see Table 7). Five out of eight of our part-time TEF indicators are materially above benchmark and two broadly in line with benchmark, with only one marginally below benchmark. Our performance with our part-time students thus, reflects the TEF Gold rating, where the student experience and student outcomes are typically outstanding. Of our Part-Time UG students, 17.3% are studying on BA Applied Education Studies, which is designed specifically for part-time delivery and attracts applicants who work in an education setting and are seeking a qualification to progress in their career. We have recently evaluated our part-time provision, in order to transfer the successes to our full-time provision where relevant.



60. Our completion rates for full-time UGs in Table 8 are marginally materially below benchmark (-2.6 percentage points). Our work detailed for our Continuation rates, tailoring support for students throughout their academic journey, has been developed to improve both our Continuation and Completion rates.

Completion	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	4-Year Aggregate Indicator	4-Year Aggregate Benchmark	Relationship to TEF benchmark
Full-Time	86.1%	83.2%	82.5%	72.5%	81.0%	83.6%	Materially below
Part-Time	72.5%	78.3%	80.5%	80.0%	77.1%	73.0%	Materially above
Apprenticeship	[none]	[none]			[none]		

*Table 8 UoB Completion indicators (from OfS Student Experience TorR workbook, September 2022)*

61. Our internal data gives us early indicators that targeted work is positively impacting on Continuation and Completion. For example, specifically relating to attainment gaps and our APP targets, improvements are shown in four out of five of our indicators, including reducing gaps between IMD Quintile 1 and 5.
62. Our approaches to improve Continuation and Completion rates, with the aim to address or mitigate factors negatively impacting on student achievement are i) our Student Success Framework, aligned to the Student Futures Manifesto and the student journey; ii) enabling students to feel a sense of belonging through our Belong@Beds work; iii) excellent personal academic tutoring; iv) support for academic writing through our Study Hub service and Studiosity; v) enhancements to our policy and practice for supporting students who fail and need to re-sit and re-take; and vi) introduction of learner analytics, attendance monitoring and engagement.
63. Our 'Student Success Framework' illustrated in Figure 1 in the Context section, brings together key academic and student support strategies into a coherent framework for delivering student success for the mix of the University's student body. The full Framework is underpinned by the Student Futures Commission Report, 2021, aligned to the six themes identified in the Student Futures Manifesto (UPP Foundation<sup>xxii</sup>), with our addition of 'support for academic studies'. It aligns with our institutional approach to supporting each stage of the student journey, 'Begin, Thrive and Succeed', starting with our Foundation Year and targeting resources and support where needed. It also responds to the SU 2021 Survey where 27% of 461 students agreed that 'My previous education did not prepare me well for university' (with 27% of 685 also in the 2020 SU Survey). This Framework focuses on improving our Continuation and Completion rates. Working at the 'Begin' stage and across every level and transition point to increase students' opportunities to continue in their studies and succeed. To evidence impact on the 'Begin' phase, 82% of students strongly agreed or agreed that the academic induction schedule was well organised and helped them prepare for the coming semester (Begin@Beds Survey, 2022, completed by 539 first year students). Students identifying 'lack of confidence in academic writing skills' as the most common possible barrier. This is discussed in tutorials with students, and students are signposted to academic resources and support, as described in SE5 and SE6.
64. Belong@Beds was initially piloted in the School of Applied Social Studies to support students in the post-pandemic return to campus. Belonging was placed at the heart of the School's well-being framework, as considerable evidence suggests that a sense of belonging underpins a student's academic success. The theory of change posits, that students participating in Belong@Beds activities will develop understanding of diversity, belonging and success. This understanding will inform a greater appreciation of challenges and barriers that are common

amongst the student population and how these can be overcome to help them continue on their student academic journey. Following successful implementation within the School, this project is being embedded across the whole institution. Student co-creators have been employed to support delivery and evaluation, which will result in the development of the Belonging Pedagogic Toolkit.

65. Our long-standing personal academic tutoring scheme is another of our key interventions to help improve continuation rates as described in SE5. Our policy is that new students meet their personal academic tutor within the first 3 weeks of the start of the course, to provide the help students need to overcome initial concerns and challenges relating to their studies or wider university experience. Success in achieving this was highlighted in BedsSU Survey, 2022 (in SE5), with 89% of students who met their Personal Academic Tutor reported they were able to help them either directly or by signposting them to support.
66. Through our Personal Academic Tutoring scheme, we have identified an increase in students reporting that personal circumstances impacted on academic engagement and success. In response, we set out a commitment in our APP 2021 update, to identify named advisors in our Student Engagement Team and this was implemented from September 2022. Each advisor provides specialist support to a student group, including: pregnant students and student parents; care experienced students; students independent from families; students who are carers; under 18s; homeless students; and those who have experienced or experiencing domestic abuse. The advisors ensure they are up to date with support networks and will offer drop-in and appointments for students. Engagement has increased with all student groups, particularly the pregnant student group, which now offers a monthly drop-in response to the high demand. A new web resource, Support Plus, was developed to complement this provision, so students can access support and information independently if preferred, in addition to the direct support from personal academic tutors and other academic staff.
67. Two examples of our work to improve continuation as well as completion are our policies and practices for supporting students who fail and need to re-sit and re-take, and our commitment and introduction of learner analytics, and attendance monitoring and engagement. We have piloted a learner analytics system in the Health and Social Sciences in 2022 alongside new 'academically at-risk' policies to act on early indicators of low engagement or barriers to success. Staff and student feedback has been positive, informing our university roll out of learner analytics and attendance monitoring and engagement, planned for 2023-24.
68. The University delivers positive outcomes for our students, enabling students to progress into managerial or professional employment, and further study. Graduate Outcomes (GO) data is monitored through the University Employability Working Group. The disaggregated data, according to subject areas and to student groups, has revealed priority areas for enhancement and targeting interventions. Our focus for improvement is on all those courses below the Office for Students threshold and our TEF benchmarks. At the CAH-2 subject level, the University is materially above benchmark in six subjects (Education and Teaching, Computing, Health and Social Care, Law, Biosciences, and Sport and Exercise Sciences) and good practice is regularly shared through our University Employability Working Group.
69. Our Progression indicators are broadly in line with our benchmark for both part-time and full-time provision shown in Table 9. Our Curriculum Change Programme has a focussed employability pathway, to enrich student experience through employer engagement. Core

professional service areas, including our Careers and Employability team, support our achievement of very high quality rates of successful progression for our mix of students.

Progression	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	4-Year Aggregate Indicator	4-Year Aggregate Benchmark	Relationship to TEF benchmark
Full-Time	71.1%	68.5%	65.9%		68.8%	67.4%	Broadly in line
Part-Time	80.2%	82.0%	84.9%		82.0%	79.6%	Broadly in line
Apprenticeship	[none]	[none]	[low]		[low]		

Table 9 UoB Progression indicators (from OfS Student Experience TorR workbook, September 2022)

70. The University Careers and Employability Service has Employability Advisors who are linked to each Faculty, providing support to courses on all campuses and study centres. Employability Advisors work within the curriculum delivering career development and employability themes including subject-specific Careers Fairs. Examples include the annual Teaching Fair, STEM Fair, and Nursing Fair. The team also provide comprehensive 1-1 careers guidance to students and graduates outside of the curriculum through drop-in, email support, CV reviews and guidance sessions. In 2021-22, there were 2137 individual interactions with students.
71. The Careers team have dedicated Recruitment and Volunteering teams to support our students to find opportunities. In 2021-22 the recruitment team supported students into paid and unpaid positions through 199 meetings with employers, advertising 2747 posts and managing the recruitment to 81 positions. We run volunteering fairs for students at all levels of their studies, providing them with excellent opportunities for skills and knowledge development and to grow their professional networks. From September 2020 to October 2022, over 42,000 hours of volunteering have been recorded, which includes students undertaking unpaid student representation and peer-support roles. The demographic of the students who volunteered in 2021-22 indicated that this opportunity is taken up by a wide range of students in terms of IMD (35% IMD1 or 2), POLAR (28% POLAR 1 or 2) and ethnicity (23% Asian/Asian British; 17% Black).
72. The Careers and Employability Service lead our Career Development Award, which is designed to help students explore their career options, plan, and prepare for their future and achieve their career goals. This Award has been embedded into the curriculum in all courses within the School of Applied Social Studies, and courses within Sport Science and Physical Activity, including Sports Therapy and Rehabilitation, resulting in 217 students receiving an award since September 2020. These courses were targeted to provide an increased level of support in subject areas with highly skilled employment outcomes of less than 60%. To illustrate success, Table 8 of the TEF Workbook for the University for the Full-Time Progression overall and split indicators for total UGs in the Taught and Registered Population (2/3), CAH-2 Subject Health and Social Care was 9.9% above benchmark and Sport and Exercise Sciences above benchmark by 7%. This initiative will be expanded into other courses below threshold.

## Our approach to educational gain (SO4-6)

### Identifying and articulating the range of educational gains for students (SO4)

73. Underpinning the University of Bedfordshire's widening participation mission is the commitment to provide an education which transforms the lives of all students and enables

them to achieve success. In the context of our student demographics, we have identified the need to drive social mobility primarily through career readiness and career enhancement as an essential element of our value-added. This links intrinsically to the need to develop confidence and relevant competences that prepare students effectively for not only academic success but also future graduate level employment, improved careers or further study. Our mixed-methods research in 2021, designed to gain insight into the experiences and motivations of students within our APP target groups, also reports that future career prospects are cited as one of the highest motivations for all our students<sup>xxiii</sup>, whilst students from IMD Quintiles 1 and 2 rated personal development, a chance of a higher salary, and gaining independence as well as life experiences, as their top motivators, that prepare students effectively for not only academic success but also future graduate level employment, improved careers or further study.

74. Our metrics reflect the relatively low qualification starting point, and limited professional backgrounds and experiences of many of our students. They also highlight the distance students must be supported to travel in their learning, and the importance of our University teaching and learning strategy which provides curriculum and support frameworks to enable our students to achieve our educational gain ambitions.
75. Career readiness and career enhancement has been identified by key University stakeholders as priorities for education gain, to inform provision that develops related capabilities and experiences. The Education and Student Experience Strategy 2022-26 commits to create “academic, co- and extra-curricular activities to enable and inspire students to seek and take up the wide range of opportunities to enhance their enjoyment, engagement and success in their degree outcomes, graduate employment and lifelong learning.” (p.1). The University’s commitment to enhancing graduate employability and educational gain is evident through its’ strategic goals and KPIs.

### ***Evidence of our commitment to career readiness and enhancement tailored to students and their starting points (SO5)***

76. We embed employability within the curriculum to contribute to an outstanding academic experience and to enable students to achieve successful progression into graduate level employment or further study. This is achieved through our University Curriculum Change Programme that began in April 2022. We have focused our educational gain on developing the competencies that will enhance both life skills as well as advancing our graduates in work. This responds to student feedback surveys in the last 3 years (SU Survey, 2020, 2021; and Begin@Beds Survey, 2022), highlighting success in employment as a primary motivator of their degree. Our employability strategic plan, and educational gain as part of this, is informed by evidence-based practice from the Advance HE funded reports<sup>xxiv</sup>.
77. Supporting educational gains underpins our curriculum approach, firstly through our curriculum framework CRe8, and advanced further through our Curriculum Change Programme. CRe8 was revised to include elements which embed career and personal development and authentic tasks in assessment strategies, and focuses on transferable skills and employability competencies to prepare students for a complex and changing world. By creating new Employability roles in all Schools, the University established an effective approach to integrate these alongside subject-based knowledge and skills. This approach corresponded with the positive impact on student outcomes according to the Destination of Leavers of Higher

Education data which showed a progressive increase in graduate employability/ further study from 88.3% (for 2014) to 89.7% (2015), to 91.9% in (2016) and 91.4% (2017).

78. Our Curriculum Change Programme was launched in April 2022 to provide a consistent and University-wide method of course enhancements. This involved course teams undertaking a mapping exercise across every level of UG courses, to identify three pathways for employability as outlined in SE3: work-related/work-based learning; career readiness/enhancement; and course-based graduate competencies. Course-based career readiness/enhancement includes: career management and employability skills development; exploring career options; and job-seeking skills. The graduate competencies pathway includes, for example digital skills development (specialist or otherwise), developing self-awareness, and confidence; together, constituting part of a competitive positioning for the University of Bedfordshire graduates.
79. The Student Journey: Begin, Thrive and Succeed, was launched in July 2022 to communicate to students the support aligned to, and the distinct stages of, their development at University (from registration through to graduation and employment). We alert students to the importance of taking-up the various offers of support and opportunities provided to them during their journeys, recognising the different starting points of our students.
80. We have responded to our regional context, whereby many students come from entrepreneurial families (Bedfordshire is one of the most entrepreneurial counties in the UK). Since 2014, the University has, through various programmes (including B-Innovative, B-More Entrepreneurial, Creative Spark, Creative and Cultural Entrepreneurs, Heritage Accelerators) provided training to students to enable them to access graduate start-ups. The current Pathways, Progress, Pursuit and Profit model has involved recruitment of a new Entrepreneurship Officer in 2022 to improve the student business start-up advice programme: "Be More Entrepreneurial". This offers a ladder of support, technical support and secondments for students and has directly supported 942 graduate start-ups. The University has been in the top 10 for graduate start-ups since metrics were recorded in 2015.

### ***Targeted evaluation and enhancement of educational gains (SO6)***

81. The University uses a combination of metrics and processes to collect, monitor and evaluate data on the impacts of provision and educational gain. This includes our continuous improvement planning with Course Enhancement Plans. We have redeveloped our first year survey (Begin@Beds Survey, 2022) for both the Foundation year and Level 4 to include questions to help us take a longitudinal and cohort tracking method to measure career readiness/course enhancement. We record student numbers taking placements, internships, sandwich years. In addition, we are identifying the number of units per course implementing work-based learning compared with work-related learning in units.
82. Educational gains are also evaluated through our analysis of Graduate Outcomes (GO) data. Overcoming the time lag associated with the production of the GO data, the University opted in 2018 for the bank of NSS Optional Questions on employability preparedness, to provide an annual source of data with which to monitor provision. The consistently above sector-average NSS scores for these optional question banks as illustrated in Figure 3, and reinforced through our positive progression indicators, demonstrate that our students acknowledge the positive impact of our teaching, learning and support on their personal development and employability.



We have increased our capacity to evaluate educational gain, investing in new staff roles from 2020 to provide dedicated resources to improve data collection and research- informed practice for our Education and Student Experience Strategy.

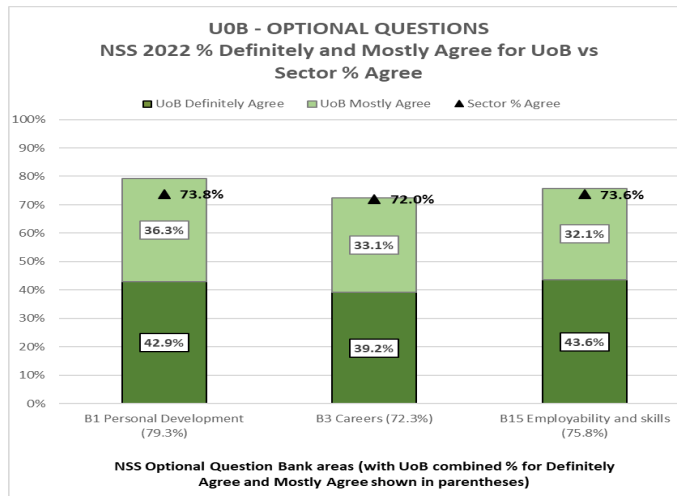


Figure 3 NSS 2022 Optional Question Bank areas based on 638 responses

## Summary Statement

83. Our submission demonstrates our commitment to very high quality provision through institution-wide practices, tailored for our mix of students and courses, designed to increase the abilities, confidence and aspirations of our distinct student body. As a widening participation institution, we are proud that the majority of our students who complete their course go on to achieve high levels of graduate success. We are driven to improve our Student Experience and Student Outcome indicators for full-time students to reflect our very high quality of provision as detailed in our submission. We have turned around our Student Experience indicators in the NSS 2022 after a decline during the Covid years and we are confident that our significant institutional transformation undertaken in the past 24 months has increased Bedfordshire's capacity and expertise to continue on a positive trajectory towards an outstanding educational experience and improved student outcomes.

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