Provider name: University of Plymouth
UKPRN: 10007801

University of Plymouth TEF 2023

1. Provider context

1.1 Mission and vision

The University of Plymouth advances knowledge and transforms lives. We are committed through our institutional strategy, University 2030: A Future of Excellence [1], to deliver outstanding education that makes a difference, improving local, national and global communities. The pillars of our strategy that support this ambition are:

- ensuring an innovative education portfolio;
- delivering research-enhanced, experiential education;
- providing excellent student support to ensure critical skills for our graduates' futures;
- maintaining quality learning spaces and resources;
- supporting a diverse student population to maximise educational gains.

The Education and Student Experience Strategy 2018–23 [2], an integral part of the University strategy, supports the continuation of an established institutional culture of excellence in teaching and learning. Strategic development ensures we are always focused on improving the student experience and outcomes through appropriate investment, with all major initiatives embedded across the University. This allows us to support our diverse student population, ensuring every student can achieve their potential and maximise their educational gains.

Our teaching and research activities are divided into three faculties:

- Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Business (Plymouth Business School, Plymouth Institute of Education, School of Art, Design and Architecture, and School of Society and Culture).
- Faculty of Health (Peninsula Dental School, Peninsula Medical School, School of Biomedical Sciences, School of Health Professions, School of Nursing and Midwifery, and School of Psychology).
- Faculty of Science and Engineering (School of Biological and Marine Sciences, School of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics, and School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences).

The success of our students is defined by the acquisition of a set of skills and values relevant to current and future employment and society. These graduate attributes are developed in the context of the discipline being studied, but also reflect the broader university experience. We define these attributes in the Plymouth Compass, developed in partnership with students in 2015, which supports students in navigating their way through the whole university experience – taught curriculum, experiential learning, and extracurricular activities. To ensure the Plymouth Compass is embedded across the institution, programme teams use a design tool [3] to explore how and where their programme promotes the key attributes of a University of Plymouth graduate, defined as:

- The Critical and Creative Learner, able to learn independently, explore new avenues with confidence, and think in a critical, creative and enterprising manner, enabling them to function effectively in a complex and ever-changing society.
- The Sustainable and Global Citizen, able to contribute to a more sustainable future as an informed, responsible and active citizen, both locally and globally.
- The Competent and Confident Professional ready to play an active role in shaping a sustainable society and economy, understand the importance of managing their own career and promote a positive work-life balance.

- The Resilient and Thriving Individual who values and develops the wellbeing of themselves and others and appreciates the role of evidence-based ways towards a flourishing life.

More recently, the Plymouth Compass has been supported by a theory of change for educational gains (section **3.3.1**) ensuring the required activities, outputs and outcomes are delivered across the University. This theory is predicated upon taking students from a diversity of learning backgrounds and developing them to become motivated, able, and agile graduates ready for the current and future demands of employers.

1.2 Student population

Our undergraduate (UG) student population is approximately 15,000 and predominantly full-time (FT), with only very few on part-time courses (1.3%; section **1.3**) or apprenticeships (1.6%; section **1.4**). We draw most of our students from the South West (66% of UK domiciled UG FT students), a region with the lowest progression to HE or training to Level 4 or higher (59.5% vs 77.0% for London, the highest). Our extensive outreach activities support widening participation, raising aspiration and involvement in our communities. We improve the opportunities for students in regional 'cold spots' via our extensive and longstanding regional partner college network, while supporting the aspiration of our partners to obtain their own degree awarding powers (section **1.5**). Our portfolio includes courses with an integrated foundation year, providing a route into HE for students returning to study or who are insufficiently qualified for direct entry into Level 4.

Our student body has higher than sector average numbers in several demographic groups: disabled (20.5% with a declared disability vs 14.9% sector average); students in receipt of the Disabled Students' Allowance (10.7% vs 7.7%); from state schools (93.8% vs 90.7%, location adjusted benchmark; 2021 HESA data); and low participation neighbourhoods (15.3% vs 14.3%; location adjusted benchmark). Regional demographics also greatly affect the ethnicity of our students, with BAME students representing only 10.8% compared to 26.5% for the sector. Although still relatively small we have a growing population of international students (2017/18 8.9% vs 2020/21 11.4%). We have a significant population of commuter students whose travel is often challenging due to the transport infrastructure in the region. In 2017/18 our 'Stay at Home' students, with identical term-time and vacation postcodes within the Plymouth city boundaries, represented only 8.5% of students, whereas commuter students who travel daily from outside the PL1–PL9 area constituted 21.6% [4]. We also deliver education on three sites in Plymouth, as well as in Exeter and Truro. These characteristics are always at the forefront of design and delivery, embedded into processes and policies, ensuring excellent student experience and outcomes for our student population wherever they are studying.

1.3 Part-time student population

Part-time (PT) students represent a very small proportion of our UG population (1.1%). The majority of PT UG students (82%) are those who were registered on the BSc (Hons) Health Studies course, designed to fulfil the CPD needs of working healthcare professionals who complete one module at a time, engaging with the course over several years. This flexibility is a necessity for healthcare professions to manage their professional development. The course was re-coded in 2015/16, following agreement with HEFCE, to accurately reflect the situation, effectively removing this cohort from the completion and continuation population from that point forward. Our modelling, based on the removal of these CPD students, reveals that our PT completion changes from 26.2% to 62.2%, an above benchmark performance. PT continuation is only below benchmark in year 1, with the year 4 data (most recent) showing 92% continuation for

this cohort, materially above benchmark. The previous inappropriate registration of students on a course that is significant for the continuing education of the healthcare workforce in the South West should not be interpreted, therefore, as evidence of failure to support these students.

1.4   Apprenticeships

The University has developed an apprenticeships strategy focused in particular areas of our portfolio, especially those addressing critical employment gaps in the South West region. However, as these programmes only cover a small subset of our provision, are relatively recent initiatives, and numbers are relatively small (1.6%), we consider it too early to consider these programmes within this TEF submission but anticipate they will be included in future submissions.

1.5   Academic partnerships

We have many longstanding collaborative academic partners located across the South West who deliver University-approved, successful, higher education programmes within a further education (FE) context: this equates to 16 partners with approximately 4,000 students each year. Of these partners, 12 are Office for Students (OfS) registered and two have foundation degree awarding powers. The University works collaboratively to support them, sharing events and activities, and the benefits of that support are apparent from their own, independent TEF submissions. Our Partnership Forum is used to promote our teaching and learning culture, and to pass on best practice across the partnership network in the UK and in trans-national education. The University values partnership as a means of providing inclusive, high quality student learning opportunities built on research-informed practice with co-designed, co-delivered and co-monitored programmes. We will not be including students registered with our partners. However, included in our data and narrative submission are, of course, those students entering the University from our partner FE providers, predominantly at Level 6 (approximately 250 students each year).

2. Student experience

2.1   Summary of the indicators for student experience

The University is committed to providing excellent teaching and learning for all our students. Our strategic and integrated approach to the student experience ensures we provide personalised and timely support to our diverse student community. This is particularly evident in the outstanding, materially above benchmark performance in assessment and feedback and in academic support, but also in all other indicators of student experience – teaching on my course, learning resources and student voice are all above the benchmark values. The FT UG population data include 270 split metrics related to student experience; 40% are materially above benchmark, 54% within benchmark (+/- 2.5%) and only 6% materially below benchmark.

2.2   Academic experience and assessment

2.2.1   Teaching, feedback and assessment (SE1)

The established, University-wide, and embedded culture of excellence in teaching and learning reflects the pillars of our institutional and education strategies (section **1.1**) and embodies the characteristics of our student cohorts (section **1.2**), our support for the development of teaching staff (section **2.3.1**), the design and delivery of our curricula (section **2.2.2**), development and effective utilisation of innovative physical and virtual learning resources, and extensive support for personalised learning (section **2.3**). The result is a focus on in-person teaching that applies an active, research-informed and experiential approach, promoting engagement and challenging students to reach their potential. The foundations of this culture stem from more than £12 million of

HEFCE Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning initiative funding (2005–10) and a University-wide Curriculum Enrichment Project (2015–18) which re-introduced a semester structure and regulatory changes designed to promote students' early engagement and success with HE study. These initiatives created and embedded resources and ways of working, sharing good practice across the University, to the benefit of students in the TEF period.

We have a strategic ambition of assessing our students in a manner that is authentic and contextualised, inclusive and accessible to all. The 'Assessment for Learning' project (2013–16), working with staff and students, reviewed assessment practices and student experiences of assessment, making several recommendations for how we could produce more innovative assessments and ensure equal access [5]. We have now embedded authentic assessments across the University, defined as an assessment requiring students to use the same combinations of knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need to apply in the criterion situation in professional life. Inclusive assessment is also a cornerstone of our educational practice across the institution, helping to support our higher-than-average number of students declaring a disability (section **1.2**), with impact evidenced by a substantial reduction in the awarding gap for students with a known disability, reducing from 5.2% in 17/18 to zero in 2020/21, as well as the materially above benchmark NSS indicators. We have confirmed that this awarding gap has remained at zero for our 2021/22 cohort and therefore reflects changes to assessments and increased student support, rather than changes enforced during the pandemic.

The University assessment policy [6], supported by the assessment setting, marking and moderation policy [7], is regularly updated to reflect innovations in practice, and is governed by the University Teaching Learning and Quality Committee (UTLQC; a committee of Senate), and representation from our Students' Union (UPSU) ensures students are central to developments. The requirements of these policies, validated through our quality assurance processes (section **2.2.2**), ensure there is consistency in assessment tasks, clarity of assessment criteria, anonymous marking, timeframes and effective feedback. Significant areas of innovation and good practice across the institution include introduction of 24/48-hour open-book assessments during COVID-19, now incorporated into core assessment practices to promote inclusivity. They provide authenticity and are more aligned to working practices through displaying application of understanding rather than knowledge and recall, and are more accessible, particularly for those groupings within our Access and Participation Plan (APP; [8]), including those with a disability and international students [9]. Examples across the institution include:

Faculty of Health. The Peninsula Medical School received an Erasmus award to develop Computerised Adaptive Testing for medical knowledge assessments. This follows a decade of innovation in knowledge assessment using a programmatic approach to learning outcomes through Progress Testing across both the Medical and Dental Schools. This approach allows rapid review and remediation, and improved support for struggling students, as well as preparing students for future practice across all School programmes [10]. The design and delivery of the assessments have been developed through, and underpinned by, extensive research and pedagogy [11]. The use of e-assessments in the clinical environment has allowed for a holistic view of student performance and ensured that completing the marking and feedback is easy and accessible to those outside of the University core staff.

Faculty of Science and Engineering. Assessments focus on developing a mirror of professional practice. Examples include Computer Science where students are required to meet an external client's live software design brief. This applies the industry standard approach of continuous review and reshaping of the product with regular feedback to the client, interspersed with development sprints. In Environmental Science there is a written assignment of a briefing paper that closely mimics the style of a POSTnote, a structured four-page briefing reviewing emerging areas of research. Assessments also use multiple formats including written, spoken, digital and image-based communication formats, and group assessments, using University-wide principles [12], that further encourage social skills, articulation and discussion and develop skills valued by employers.

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Business. Within each programme, we assess students in a way which encourages them to deploy their learning in real-world and interdisciplinary contexts. A key example is our Common Challenge Module where students can develop an understanding of the big challenges business and society are facing today, drawn from the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In the Plymouth Business School, for example, the module is mandatory and requires them to undertake at least one group assessment in response to a live challenge brief set by a local business with an interest in sustainability. The students work together to form a tangible response such as a poster, demonstration, talk or film that addresses the challenge. They are supported by a range of guest speakers from industry and third-sector organisations.

2.2.2 Programme design, delivery and quality assurance (SE2)

Our programmes are designed and delivered to ensure we provide an academic experience that promotes the development of critical skills for our students' futures, alongside personalised support (section 2.3.2). All our programmes are designed to inspire our students, ensuring they are active learners and can reach their full potential. The key underlying principles across the University are to provide research-embedded teaching and learning, 'learning by doing' through experiential learning, and the opportunity to utilise their developing skillset in real-world and authentic situations.

Faculty of Health. The improvement of programmes is continuous, driven by our internal review processes and changing professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRB) requirements. We have also made more significant changes to programmes following feedback from students. Examples include the BSc (Hons) Optometry where the course changes included standardisation of practical examinations, use of technology including logging of patient encounters and an e-learning portfolio, resulting in being ranked as the top Optometry course for overall satisfaction in the last three years of the NSS. Similarly, following recommendations from a periodic review, a new BSc (Hons) Psychology degree was launched in 2018 with an emphasis on embedding graduate employability, supported by authentic assessment types, a thread of problem-based learning in multidisciplinary teams, data analysis, engagement with research and active learning.

The high ranking in medicine and dentistry for overall satisfaction, regularly ranked in the top three with 92.8% and 97.6% satisfaction, respectively, reflects the design of courses that actively engage students, developing their clinical skills and pushing them to study subjects in greater depth. The Medicine degree benefits from close relationships with our five principal NHS partners who help develop the course and provide wide-ranging placements. Students learn from real patients from the outset, and student learning is embedded in best practice through the internationally renowned research that constantly feeds into the teaching. A student's academic and clinical learning is underpinned by a deep understanding of foundational science and developed through skills

learning in low- and high-fidelity simulation in world-class facilities. The Student Selected module has been restructured to better support the core and transferable skills highlighted by the GMC, and projects in year 3 are embedded in the community. They have been highlighted by employers as developing advocacy skills, as in this example from an addiction recovery charity (2021 project): "*This is a fabulous piece of work. Not only is it very interesting and highlights the value of the work we do in tangible numbers but it will allow us to use sections to validate our applications for funding and in presentations.*" Dental students also benefit from early clinical contact with a strong patient focus, treating patients through partnership with the NHS Primary Care Trust in Devon and Cornwall, as the first institution to immerse students in clinical practice from year 1. Peninsula Dental School was the first to focus training solely in primary care, and the first to train a variety of dental care professionals side by side, reflecting the reality of dental practice and creating interprofessional understanding and respect at the earliest stages. Students engage directly with participants and service users in a unique and meaningful way with the Community Engagement Team. The most recent full inspection in 2019 by the General Dental Council stated: "*The University of Plymouth is an exemplary programme.*"

Faculty of Science and Engineering. The subjects in this Faculty are characterised by the extensive, planned and coherent curriculum of experiential learning. This is typically evident through extensive practical work in laboratories, workshops and fieldwork in the natural environment, as well as in work-based learning. This provides an immersive experience that increases engagement, motivation and confidence, and typically takes a problem-solving, solutions-focused approach to real world issues. Across the engineering disciplines, programmes were redesigned in 2020 with embedded year-long practical modules to give prominence and coherence to the practical curriculum and strong links to all theoretical components. In addition to opportunities in the curriculum, students are encouraged and supported to engage in discipline-relevant extracurricular activities, including Formula Student, a well-established educational engineering competition, and Low Carbon Devon, a series of solutions-focused and practical internships and workshops focused on implementing change.

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Business. In 2021, we launched a faculty wide implementation of a full curriculum re-evaluation, referred to internally as the 'Twenty-First-Century Curriculum Project', with an emphasis on ensuring all programmes are structured through principles of interdisciplinarity, expert-led learning, and hands-on learning, personalised wherever possible. One example is the innovative 'stick or swap' curriculum developed by the School of Society and Culture allowing students to select bolt-on electives from any other School discipline (Levels 5 and 6), and are carefully designed to support students encountering a new discipline for the first time. Another example is the BA (Hons) Architecture. In April 2022, the Royal Institute of British Architects revalidated the course, based on the past few years of delivery, with commendations for the impact of our live project-based work on both learning and the wider community, a vibrant and supportive studio culture, and an exemplary approach to collaborative working enabling students to become mature future professionals. Students work on live design projects, with strong links to Plymouth City Council and other community projects and are stretched further through the Cross Professional Dialogue forum.

Integrated foundation degree courses. In the Schools of Biomedical Science, Dentistry, and Medicine, courses share a foundation year consisting of shared modules developing foundational science, core and transferable skills, and independent learning skills. Students attend placements in the community to help them diversify their experience and gain an understanding of the broader

patient population, also developing their confidence and aspiration. Significantly, the year focuses on improving the students' cultural currency and healthcare literacy. In the School of Society and Culture, foundation teaching in blocks on specific days of the week benefits students who must work alongside their studies or have carer responsibilities, and often commute into Plymouth. The students are taught core academic and research skills for their subjects, ideal for those who have been out of education for some time. Teaching is accompanied by extensive personal tutoring, extra tutorials, and social events to support these students, many of whom have mental health issues and other complex circumstances, to build a community, supporting their retention. Integrated foundation courses within the Faculty of Science and Engineering are designed to build confidence and create an effective transition to higher education. Specialist early sessions focus on learning skills, leading to a stronger discipline focus as a bridge to entering degree-level study. An experiential approach, using practical work, is used to break down and demonstrate complex topics, and to provide opportunities for discussion with peers and teaching staff.

Quality assurance. The assurance of quality starts at the point of programme design and approval, including those approved for delivery by our partner colleges. This ensures provision supports students to meet or exceed sector-recognised standards and our regulations for the award of credit. External professional and academic advisers are members of Approval Panels and provide independent assessments of standards. Where possible our programmes are accredited by the relevant PSRB; this currently covers more than 50% of our UG portfolio. Teaching, Learning and Quality Committees at School, Faculty and University level are responsible for the quality, evaluation and enhancement of teaching, learning and assessment practice, and for the maintenance of academic standards. Annual review at School level, built up from programme level, is presented at UTLQC ensuring an opportunity for scrutiny and confirmation of alignment with the University Education and Student Experience Strategy [2]. Review includes teaching and learning metrics, identifying key enhancement actions. The annual review is an integral part of the University planning cycle, providing a robust mechanism linking teaching quality data into Faculty resource planning. In addition, the periodic review process ensures the University discharges its responsibilities for monitoring academic standards and quality (including PSRB where relevant), and student achievement, the coherence and relevance of its portfolio, the quality of student learning opportunities, opportunities for strategic/deliberate enhancement, and the research environment including embedding within the curriculum. Integrated into the QA process is work undertaken by external examiners, ensuring academic standards are maintained, and that assessments operate fairly and equitably in accordance with University regulations. A review of the four-year period of the TEF submission showed our external examiners were particularly positive on our assessment and feedback to students, further evidenced by materially above benchmark indicators in the student experience measures. The following are the percentage of external examiners submitting unsolicited positive comments on each theme over the four years; marking and moderation practices clear (67%), good feedback given to students (61%), assessment and activities align to future careers and employment (39%).

2.2.3   Enrichment of the student experience (SE3)
Research-led teaching and learning. Most new academic appointments are to the balanced research and teaching academic pathway, ensuring students are taught by active researchers. Our research-informed teaching emphasises students as participants and is therefore an important extension of experiential learning. All students undertake research, typically culminating in the final year dissertation, often working in groups and some of this is published. Although staff and students collaborate routinely on such publications, a specific example is the Plymouth Student

Scientist, established through the HEFCE-funded Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund, that has published 400 articles (approximately 30 per year) by STEM students [13] and gaining over 450,000 views. A recent survey demonstrates the positive impact of publishing on participating students, who cite increased motivation and confidence, understanding of the publishing process and new employability skills. Staff in Engineering have redesigned the dissertation [14] to facilitate publication and the attendant benefits to students. In History and related disciplines, mentoring students to achieve award-winning research has become standard practice. For example, the History curriculum scaffolds research training through its curriculum from Level 4, culminating in carefully planned exposure to specific staff research topics in Level 6. As a result, students in History have repeatedly achieved national recognition for their research. In the last seven years they have won seven separate dissertation prizes, including multiple UG dissertation prizes from the British Commission for Maritime History, and the RAF UG dissertation prize in 2022 (for 2021 dissertation). In the Faculty of Health, final year honours projects immerse students in hands-on research experience, which can lead to co-creation of publications.

Employer engagement. We have a very strong network of regional and national employers who are actively engaged from the initial design of a curriculum, inclusion of employer-relevant skills development, providing employer-based experiential learning and mentoring, and supporting our students as they enter the workplace (section **3.2.1**). Employers are included at every programme approval as this is embedded in processes. In the Faculty of Health, engagement with employers is, unsurprisingly, fully embedded into all healthcare programmes. In the Faculty of Science and Engineering, Employer Advisory Groups meet regularly to provide input into the curriculum, placement and dissertation opportunities, guidance for assessments, and access to equipment. Multiple employers join the 'Project Showcase' in Engineering disciplines at which students present and demonstrate work completed in the final year dissertation, and the underwater technology specialist company, Sonardyne, provide a full day workshop on contemporary underwater positioning technology for students on the BSc (Hons) Ocean Exploration and Surveying course. In the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Business, employers routinely feed into assessments. For example, in the Plymouth Business School, the Common Challenge Module is structured through 'flux' competitions based on live briefs from visiting employer partners who spend a day with students as they work in intensive small groups. Industry-facing praxis-based teaching is embedded within the BA (Hons) History course, with benefits for both students and employers

2.3   Resources, support and student engagement

2.3.1 Academic development for staff (SE4)

Central to achieving an outstanding academic experience for our students is a strategic and consistent focus on the development of academic staff. Embedded through our career pathways, and provision of staff training and support, we develop and recognise quality, excellence and innovation in the creation and delivery of research-informed education. Opportunities for professional development, aimed at both new and existing staff at all levels, are detailed in our Teaching Qualifications and Recognition Policy for staff in teaching, learning and assessment, and are led by the Academic Development team [15]. They cover a range of opportunities, including:

- Professional recognition for PhD students with little or no prior experience of teaching through our Supporting Teaching Learning and Assessment CPD course.
- An extended version of Supporting Assessment Learning and Teaching (SALT) CPD for newly appointed Associate Lecturers, Associate Tutors and Demonstrators who have a fractional role.
- UKPSF D1, D2 and D3 awards (Associate Fellowship, Fellowship and Senior Fellowship).

- The Introduction to Teaching and Learning (ITL), 20 credit M level module for new staff with less than one-year full time teaching experience, leading to Associate Fellowship of AdvanceHE.
- The AdvanceHE accredited Teacher Development Framework (TDF) provides all experienced staff with the opportunity to gain professional recognition in teaching and learning.
- All new staff in the Medical and Dental Schools with substantial teaching responsibilities complete a PgCert in Clinical Education [16] as part of their probation period. This programme is accredited by AdvanceHE, with completers receiving associate fellowship.

As a result, the number of staff with an AdvanceHE fellowship has remained above the sector average throughout the period of this TEF submission, in either Q1 or Q2 [17]. The impact of the policy and support has been evaluated through a survey demonstrating an increase in teaching-related knowledge and application of concepts by participants over time (**Figure 1**).
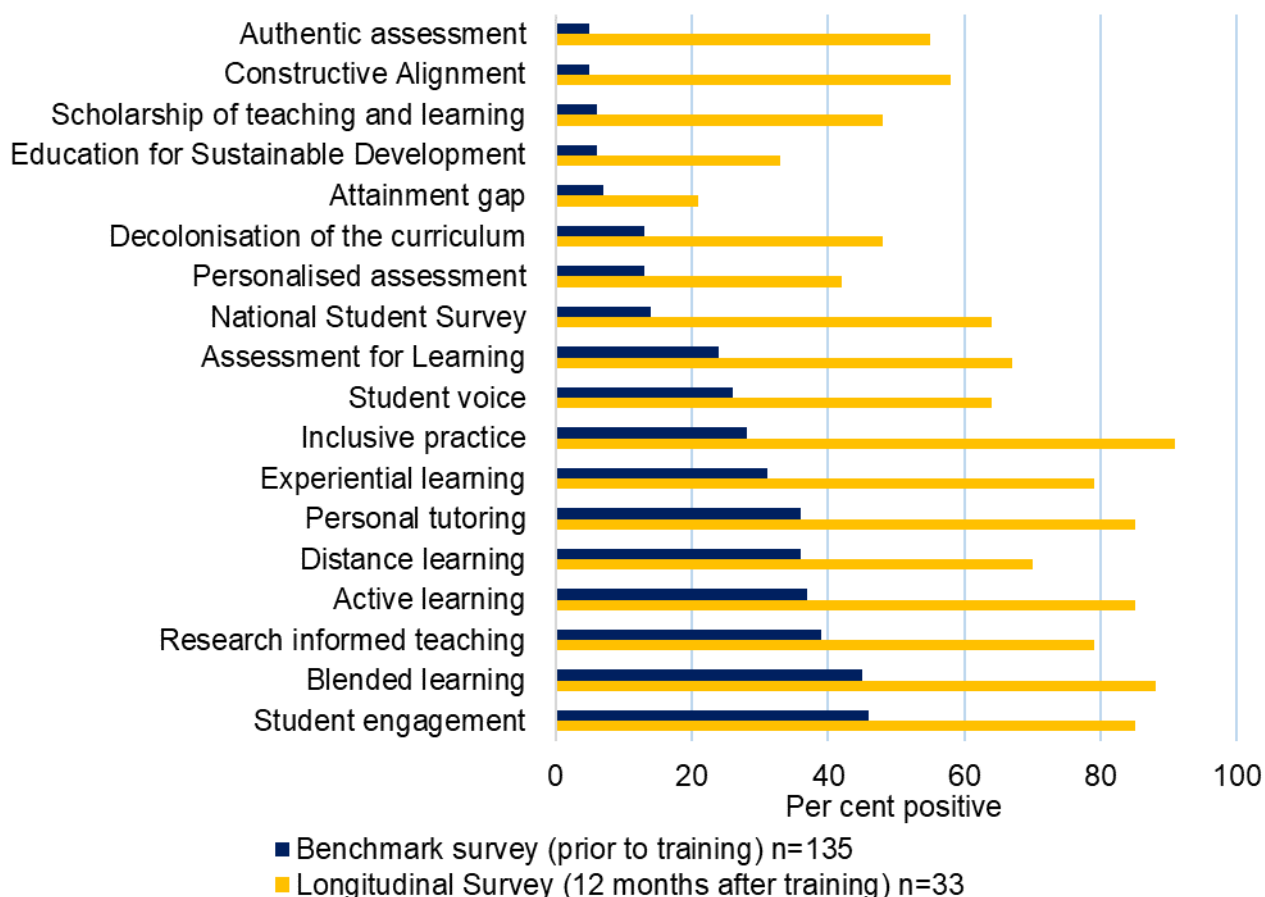

Benchmark survey (prior to training) n=135
Longitudinal Survey (12 months after training) n=33

Figure 1. *Results of a survey (2017–21) asking Introduction to Learning and Teacher Development Framework participants if they were familiar with each term and have embedded into practice, before and after training. The chart shows that for each of the knowledge and application concepts there is an increase in the per cent positive in the longitudinal survey as compared to the benchmark survey. For example, authentic assessment increases from 5% to 55%.*

2.3.2   Creating a supportive learning environment (SE5)

Providing a supportive environment to our diverse student population is key to ensuring the success of our students. The success of our integrated, innovative and personalised supportive learning environment is evident in the outstanding, materially above benchmark, overall indicator for academic support. The key policies and practices that come together to create the outstanding quality, timely and tailored academic support that meets the needs of our students are outlined in the following section.

Welcome and transition to University. As outlined above (section **1.2**), our student population is diverse and therefore their commencement requirements need careful consideration to ensure they have a positive start to their higher education. Our Welcome activities provide an exceptional onboarding experience for all our students, recognising some cohorts will need distinctive or additional interventions. For this reason, we have devised a whole-institution approach to onboarding our students, with commitment from every area of academic and professional services across the University. Recent sector evidence, involving the University, has identified the importance of 'connection', characterised by a sense of belonging and security, as the first of four planks in a successful student experience – followed by inclusion, support and autonomy [18]. In our Welcome planning, we create that initial connection, which is foundational to all later student success in terms of academic outcomes and progression.

Evidence from a large-scale internal UoP study clearly showed that the student experience during the first hundred days correlates strongly with their later success (progression Level 4 to Level 5 and academic achievement) [19]. Amongst other findings, this work showed that students with specific learning difficulties and with mental health conditions were particularly prone to fail and withdraw during Level 4, even when compared to other students with declared disabilities or long-term health conditions. Our approach to Welcome revolves around ensuring students feel secure at Plymouth and have information about support flagged to them in a way which is empowering and reassuring. Our welcome and transition innovations include:

- Live evidence base: each year, we use internal and external polling data that give us insight into pre-applicant and applicant sentiment, to ensure our Welcome offer is responsive to the needs of each specific cohort.
- A series of regular virtual events and interaction opportunities aimed at supporting new joiners before they arrive and staffed by student ambassadors to ensure they feel authentic and representative for our cohorts. This year, our internal evaluation process showed we engaged over 30% of our new joiners; 16.4% identified as disabled, 17.6% as BAME, and 28.9% as mature. This suggests our onboarding processes are effective in reaching vulnerable cohorts and those more likely to struggle at university.
- Working together with UPSU, we created a one-stop-shop help webpage which gives first-generation students and returners to education the key information they need.
- The HELLO Project matches new international students with home student buddies at the start of the academic year. Students get together to talk about living in Plymouth and studying at university, ask questions, get information, share ideas and make new friends.

We evaluate the effectiveness of our Welcome experience through two annual internal surveys: UPSU's Welcome Survey and our Pulse survey. The UPSU survey is conducted immediately after Freshers' Week and typically attracts over 1,000 responses. Over the period 2020–22, overall

satisfaction rates in this survey increased as follows: *'I feel positive about my future at university'* increased from 68% in 2020 to 85% in 2021 and 87% in 2022. Our Welcome experience has been nationally recognised, being centred in the Pearson/WonkHE report [18] on student belonging as a one of their case studies featuring national examples of good practice.

Personal tutor support. Our Personal Tutor Policy [20] promotes student achievement and lifelong learning, ensuring each individual student is known and valued, and that their needs are recognised and supported. The policy is supported by one of the University short guides from the '7 Steps Series' – '7 steps to: effective personal tutoring' [21]. To ensure excellent support is provided to all our students, we have built in multiple forms of delivery and engagement with personal tutoring meetings face to face, online or via mobile phone. Since 2017, personal tutors also have access to the Student Success System (S4 and Pulse apps within the Salesforce platform) which brings together information, reports and dashboards relating to individual students in a single place. This includes the student record, disability provisions, programmes and modules, academic and non-academic engagement, placement information and coursework submissions. This allows personal tutors, and other key members of staff, to access a holistic view of student engagement, achievement, and progression, and to determine what supportive interventions might be required. This tool ensures continual monitoring of our diverse student population, and intervention when required. The policy is reviewed regularly and updated as required through UTLQC, with revisions implemented in 2016–17, 2019–20 and 2020–21, and impact of the policy is evidenced by our outstanding, materially above benchmark indicators in academic support.

Transformative peer support. The University has a long-standing history of co-created peer-led support [22]. Our Peer Assisted Learning Scheme (PALS) has been running for over ten years, working directly with 40 programme areas and training 200 students annually to become PALS leaders who work with academic members of staff and a central support team. Since the scheme launched, over 2,500 students have worked as PALS leaders and there have been 35,000 engagements with PALS led sessions. This includes 1,245 students being provided with the opportunity to lead peer support as PALS leaders during this TEF period and almost 18,000 engagements with PALS sessions. This ensures student feedback on teaching and learning is two way and students are supported to gain confidence in their studies, to practise and develop their soft skills, and to create meaningful connections with others in their cohort. Our Writing Café was established in 2013, supporting students from across all Schools to discuss and develop their approaches and techniques to academic writing and knowledge application. The Writing Café is an example of innovation in transformative peer support where students work to support their fellow students, in collaboration with Learning Developers and English Language lecturers, to improve and explore their academic writing. Trained student mentors work daily in the Writing Café, providing support to over 2,000 students per academic year, evenly distributed across the Faculties. During the COVID-19 pandemic we were able to offer a Digital Writing Café, and in 2021–22 digital access has continued in addition to in-person support. In 2021/22, 55% of students accessing this service did so remotely, compared with just 19% in 2019/20. This pivot of practice was featured as a case study in the OfS publication *Gravity Assist: Propelling Higher Education towards a Brighter Future* [23].

A more recent transformative peer learning development is our Student Digital Champions scheme. Now in its third year, students are employed to work alongside staff and students to enhance digital learning. Since the scheme started, 30 students have worked as Digital Champions, helping to improve digital skills by providing training and resources on how to use our

digital technologies. In addition, they work with our central support staff on a range of digital projects that are key in shaping the Plymouth digital experience. Our participating students' experiences and insights have gained attention nationally and the champions have spoken at national conferences, including JISC's 'Connect More' conference (2022).

Preparing students for integrated placements. Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) funding supported the development of the Centre for Excellence in Professional Placement Learning (CEPPL) at the University, set up in 2005 to improve integrated placement learning opportunities for students. The initiative provided innovation funds, graduate fellowships, professional development funds, and dissemination funds. The evaluation of the work [24] showed that the impact of these initiatives were enhanced structures that ensure students are:

- better prepared for placement learning experiences
- appropriately supported during their time in practice
- generally experiencing enhanced access to resources
- undertaking assessments that appropriately prepare them for professional practice
- better able to integrate theory and practice
- becoming reflective, critical practitioners who offer an enhanced service to clients/service users.

In the Faculty of Health, the coordinated approach to placement quality assurance and oversight, has supported expansion of the placement footprint and the introduction of new and innovative opportunities. These include Collaborative Learning in Practice (CLiP) involving peer supervision under the guidance and oversight of a registrant 'day supervisor'. The Peninsula Medical School has never been out of the top 10 in the GMC annual survey of Foundation Doctors for perception of preparedness for practice, and was number 1 in 2019 [25]. In the Plymouth Institute of Education first-year modules introduce students to workplace settings, providing a key early grounding, with preparation supported through asynchronous learning resources. International students are given separate, specific placement advice. Discrete additional funding is also made available to support the training needs of individual students, from first aid to learning British Sign Language. In the Faculty of Science and Engineering, all programmes contain an optional placement year that supports students' application of, and learning from, professional practice, supported by pre-placement modules run by the Careers Service placement team.

Student support schemes. To support our ambitions around widening participation, and reflecting the characteristics of our student population, we offer several schemes providing financial support to students. These include the What Just Happened Fund, Mayflower Award, Care Leavers Bursary, Summer Support Fund, and Career Development Bursary. The Mayflower Award provides a bursary to UG students from the following groups: students whose household income is between £0 and £35,000 per year; care leavers; students estranged from their families; young adult carers. The award, introduced in 2015/16, is granted automatically to over 1,000 students each year, with all eligible students identified from University and Student Finance England systems. The awards are evaluated annually to explore their effectiveness in improving outcomes for students from underrepresented groups, using the OfS Financial Support Evaluation Toolkit Statistical Tool and Survey Tool. The latest evaluation (award beneficiary sample size 1,606, comparison population 2,319) confirmed students receiving the award were more likely to be living in disadvantaged areas with low levels of participation in HE and entering with lower entry qualifications. The findings indicate that the Mayflower Award is particularly effective in improving continuation for students from underrepresented groups, with 8% more continuing into year 2 and

17% more completing their degree. Other schemes providing support to students include the Tamar Engineering Project. This project, launched in 2017, provides mentoring and financial support for two to three students each year who want to embark on a career in engineering and who have shown potential for high academic achievement at A level, but whose background or personal circumstances may be a barrier to university study. Companies that support the project provide both the financial assistance of a bursary and mentoring expertise to talented students to help them develop essential workplace skills and gain an understanding of the sector and the breadth of career opportunities open to engineering graduates.

Supporting students from our partnership network. Partnership activity is run and supported by a dedicated section within Academic Registry. Our partners have senior representatives on strategic University committees, including Senate, to ensure they have a voice in strategic policy and portfolio developments. The University works with its partners to fully support progression, from programme approval to targeted support for when students are transitioning into honours degrees and postgraduate study. This includes Academic Liaison Persons (ALPs), Plymouth academics who act as discipline-specific liaison tutors for partner programmes (the identification of whom is essential to the approval of a partner programme). Amongst their roles is ensuring smooth progression and they are integral to supporting outstanding student experience at all levels (4–7). Students from our partner colleges are further supported through progression events on campus, taking the form of University-wide Progression Open Days, to bespoke programme related engagement and specific, targeted progression talks. Students are encouraged to visit the receiving School whilst studying at their partner institution and can undertake joint projects, attend inductions to workshops, meet with staff and students, shadow students, use an online progression tool, and discuss their work, interests and ambitions.

2.3.3   Physical and virtual learning resources (SE6)

As our largest central student location, the Charles Seale Hayne Library has implemented a series of transformational enhancements since 2018/19, in partnership with students, to enrich the student experience. Already open 24/7, the library learning spaces were substantially remodelled to provide a wide variety of colourful, flexible, zoned, accessible and equipped facilities catering for all learning styles. The next phase in 2019/20 involved transforming significant staff office space into new student social learning areas, releasing space for a new Student Hub next to the main library entrance, and introduction of an 'Apple genius bar' style enquiry point, the Digital Advice Zone. Student/staff communications occur daily via the usual face to face and digital media as well as a whiteboard next to the library entrance. Other innovative services introduced for student wellbeing include a library buddy service for students with anxiety, fresh fruit and a chat overnight during exam periods, and a break room for student self-catering. The library café was also expanded to provide greater space for the Writing Café (section **2.3.2**), relocated from another building, where students can meet writing mentors, the Student Learning team and digital student champions. Beyond the library building six new strategically located campus learning spaces were developed, and were designed using the same quality, styling and signage for consistency and easy identification. A new branch library was also developed at one of our satellite campuses, involving students at every stage to advise on facility and resource requirements.

The library operates a 'digital first' policy with eBooks/eResources purchased in preference to print versions wherever possible. This maximises their availability, providing equity of access to learning materials, especially to commuter students and those with less available time due to caring and other responsibilities. The reading list software was replaced in 2018/19 to enhance the student

and staff experience, and library staff regularly promote and review the usage statistics to track digital uptake. The new Student Hub opened in January 2020, bringing together the Careers Service (section **3.2.1**) and Student Services (student funding, wellbeing, counselling, mental health support, disability support and international student advice) into a single student-facing combined service at the heart of the campus. Supported by 24/7 online and self-directed resources (including an AI and multilingual self-help 'bot' in the Careers Service), the Hub has minimised the number of different student access points to key support services. Engagement also takes place through phone, email and Zoom, supporting our distance and commuter students [4]. For our integrated foundation year students, library staff work with academics to tailor existing induction and information literacy sessions with most delivered in person to help establish a strong rapport and community. Library teaching now includes interactive technologies such as Padlet, Xerte, Mentimeter and online whiteboards to actively engage students. To supplement teaching, libguides have been developed and help is available on a 1:1 basis in person or digitally to cater for all learning styles and commuter students. The above benchmark performance in the NSS question 'The library resources have supported my learning well' during this TEF period (average of four years) indicates the positive impact of these developments.

Resources to support experiential learning. For students to receive the greatest benefit from experiential learning, the resources available must be of the highest quality, be accessible to students and replicate innovation taking place in the workplace. Examples include:

- Remodelled University Marine Station (2015), a facility for shore- and boat-based learning in marine biology, ocean sciences, scientific diving and marine engineering. Resources include a fleet of vessels, industry-standard experimental equipment and autonomous marine vessels.
- LABplus, a flexible learning space that extends and enhances practical experience through self-study learning resources and equipment.
- Research/industry-standard equipment and software as a core resource, often made available through a research-informed philosophy and/or collaboration with industry. Specific examples include the Coastal, Ocean and Sediment Transport (COAST) laboratory, a world class facility providing students with access to physical model testing.
- A state-of-the-art Simulated Dental Learning Environment (SDLE) enabling learning in all aspects of dental care in a safe, controlled environment, where 'phantom heads' allow them to practise and achieve the highest skill levels before treating patients in the clinical environment.
- The Roland Levinsky Building, with facilities that include an incubation space and facilities for graphics, fine arts, 3D design and architecture. The building also houses the new Digital Fabrication and Immersive Media Laboratories, a cinema, lecture theatres, a gallery and cafés.
- The House, which is home to two large studio performance spaces, with sprung dance floors and a range of technical facilities for audio playback and stage lighting. Technicians provide advice to students assisting with designing, programming and operating the facilities. Learning resources for creative and performing arts are materially above benchmark.

Digital strategic plan. The 2015 Digital Plan, to support the then University 2020 strategy, was implemented [26], with the aim of providing sustained and comprehensive support for students and staff to enable delivery of excellent education and research. This was superseded in 2021 by the Digital Strategic Plan 2021–25 (DSP), developed in support of the new institutional strategy, 'University 2030: a Future of Excellence'. As well as containing overall aims and objectives, the DSP, which was signed off at Board level, contains specific actions, each of which have owners, timescales and expected outcomes, as well as identified funding streams, all of which are intended

to ensure our ambitions are delivered. The DSP builds upon previous initiatives and capitalises upon learning from the enhanced presence and increased student and staff engagement brought about through a networked approach to teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The DSP futureproofs the institution, allowing it to flex, adapt and respond to unforeseen challenges over the coming years and to capitalise upon developments in areas such as augmented and virtual reality and data analytics, whilst supporting our ethical and sustainability commitments through digital initiatives. A Digital Learning Environment Steering Group, with student representation, ensures the appropriate development of a suite of educational technologies. Developments delivered through the period of this TEF submission include investment in high specification AV equipment in all centrally managed teaching rooms, AI-powered automated support channel, virtual and 360° immersive learning resources to simulate real-world scenarios.

2.3.4   Students as partners (SE7)

Student voice. To ensure the University maintains a high-quality student experience, all students have an opportunity throughout their study to reflect on and evaluate their experience of academic life and the wider service offering. To this end, the University engages with its students through a variety of mechanisms with a view to learning from and responding to the student voice from students individually, collectively or through their representatives. This includes the Student Charter, course representatives, Student Staff Liaison Committees, internal student surveys, student participation in internal Periodic Reviews and student complaints and appeals. The overall indicator for the student voice was just above benchmark, with outstanding materially above benchmark in several subjects including medicine and dentistry, history, law, chemistry and psychology. In 2015, the Digital Education team working with the Peninsula Medical School developed an app, YourVoice, to simplify and extend opportunities for students to provide feedback on teaching. The app has already been adopted by the Peninsula Dental School, is being piloted by other Faculty of Health programmes and is being assessed for its suitability across the University. The app uses simplified symbols in the form of happiness emojis to 'rate' their learning experiences alongside free text feedback commentary. All feedback is centrally collated and disseminated to session providers who provide a response within a week to close the feedback loop and outline any changes planned based on comments received. Since 2015, there have been 4,500 incidences of feedback received, 87% of which were spontaneous rather than requested. Most received through the app have been overwhelmingly positive, highlighting teaching best practice. Of the comments received, 77% were good or above, with 53% at excellent. This evaluation is supported by comments from the GMC who, in 2021, stated that:

"*It appears the School demonstrates a culture that both seeks and responds to feedback from learners and educators on compliance with standards of education and training. The School takes account of the view of learners and educators and considers the impact on learners of policies, systems or processes*".

An example of significant redevelopment in response to student feedback is the BSc (Hons) Psychology. First year students' feedback indicated a perceived overlap with the A-level curriculum, with consequential impact upon student engagement. The Head of School met with the Student Council to discuss initial plans for the course refresh, and student input from this meeting fed into the Curriculum Review Steering Group, resulting in redesign of the content for year 1 modules to better differentiate from the A-level syllabus. In NSS, Psychology achieved materially above benchmark performance for Student Voice (74.9% vs 70.1% benchmark).

Partnership with UPSU. We believe the partnership between the University and UPSU is key to better supporting our diverse student population. We have developed longstanding and strong

relationships with UPSU, and work in partnership to further our student education and experience strategy. Sabbatical officers contribute to all key University committees, co-chairing the Student Experience Committee with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Education and Student Experience. Two are on the Board of Governors, and student representatives are key members of Faculty and School Teaching and Learning groups. Student-led business is a standing item on agendas, and University policies are developed in partnership with students and sabbatical officers. During the COVID-19 pandemic many students were struggling with all aspects of wellbeing and learning. The University worked with UPSU to create additional support for all aspects of the student journey, running student focus groups involving all three faculties. We directly employed outgoing sabbatical officers to work in our COVID-19 response teams and developed a cross-talking student communications group to improve our reach to all student populations. The outgoing sabbatical officers were tasked to develop the student communications strategy, working in collaboration with both academic and professional services teams from all student-facing areas of the University.

Materially below benchmark split indicators for student experience. Only 6% of the student experience split indicators were materially below benchmark (indicator value 2.5% or more below). Where the proportion of the uncertainty distribution is greater than 80 per cent, we have outlined any reasons for these values and any actions being taken.

- See section **3.2.2** for the BSc (Hons) Business Management '*Teaching on my course*'.
- The materially below benchmark split indicators for learning resources in '*Age on entry', '31 years and over*' and '*Nursing*' largely represent intersecting data. It is likely that for many of our nursing students the combined challenges of being mature students, studying at multiple sites, and a large percentage commuting, are not adequately covered by the benchmarking. However, we recognise the challenges faced by these students and as demonstrated in this section have ensured we offer flexible learning resources, using digital delivery whilst ensuring our branch libraries offer excellent resources; NSS scores in '*Learning resources*' for the School of Nursing and Midwifery increased from 72% in 2021 to 76% in 2022.
- The Student Voice indicators show significant variation across the disciplines. As well as working with UPSU to ensure that student representation and feedback are operating effectively in the areas with below benchmark indicator values, we are evaluating digital approaches for capture and feedback of the student voice including the YourVoice app (section **2.3.4**).

3. Student Outcomes

3.1   Summary of indicators for student outcomes

The FT UG population data include 180 split metrics on student outcomes; 12% are materially above benchmark, 85% within benchmark (+/- 2.5%) and only 3% materially below benchmark.

3.2   Positive outcomes

3.2.1   Student success beyond their studies (SO1)

Employer-based experiential learning and mentoring. For students with a fully integrated placement, industrial placement or study abroad, a dedicated placement advisor within the Careers Service provides specialist advice and guidance, to both students and employers. This helps to support students from a wide range of backgrounds; ensuring adequate 'stretch and challenge' on placement; and supporting employers throughout recruitment, onboarding, on-placement experience and review. Employers speak highly of our students' experience and abilities, and many are offered jobs with their placement provider upon graduation. Key employers are also

engaged with the design and development of our courses, as well as on industrial advisory committees and through PSRBs.

As placements are not always fully integrated into our courses, we ensure that shorter, more flexible and accessible experiential work opportunities are available. For example, our micro internships programme, introduced virtually during COVID-19 but provided face to face since, offers up to two weeks of work experience; in a 2021/22 survey, 84% of students responding (34% response rate) agreed that "*as a result of the micro-internship experience, they feel more confident in their abilities*". We promote casual work opportunities for students through part-time jobs fairs and the MyCareer platform; working as student ambassadors; and externally funded internships (e.g. Arts Council England/Research England funded i-Mayflower project designed to build Plymouth's creative industries; Low Carbon Devon European Regional Development Fund project supporting businesses to reach net zero). We also developed a Professional Mentoring Programme (PMP) to match students (over 1,000 in the past four years), primarily from underrepresented groups, with a professional mentor (industry, alumni and staff members with relevant industry experience). An impact evaluation of our student ambassador scheme (using our theory of change framework) showed that 607 students participated in 2021/22, with the number of students feeling quite or very confident increasing during their participation in the scheme; e.g. communication skills 93% from 63%; interpersonal skills 90% from 55%; confidence 86% from 44%; and leadership 84% from 53%. Further analysis of graduated student ambassadors in the GO survey in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20 (n=586) shows that ambassadors are on average 4.4% (range 3.4% to 5.7%) more likely to be in highly skilled work and/or further study.

Careers Service. The Careers Service, accredited through the AGCAS Membership Quality Standard, supports all students from foundation year to beyond graduation. The focus is to work within and throughout the curriculum whilst supporting an on-demand physical Careers Hub in the heart of the campus, a 24/7 career management system 'MyCareer', and a comprehensive website. MyCareer is a 24/7 portal of support for our students, and includes an employability events calendar, different types of individual career appointments, casual work to graduate-level vacancies and numerous self-directed resources on a wide range of career topics. We segment and focus our provision on different student identities and interests, including by discipline studied, stage of study, career readiness stage (section **3.3.2**), cohort (UG, home, international), distance and/or campus based, and support for our under-represented groups aligned to our APP [27]. For our international students we provide curated anytime/anywhere resources including a global database of internship, placement and graduate roles for more than 120 worldwide locations. As stated in the AGCAS Standard external reviewer summary (June 2021), *"The Careers Service at*

the University of Plymouth is an outstanding careers service which works strategically, proactively and innovatively for the benefit of its students". External national market research undertaken by Cibyl in 2021/22 across 160 HEIs showed that 80% of our students were 'satisfied or very satisfied with their careers service' compared to a sector average of 68% [28].

Employability action plan. The University has implemented a Careers and Employability Action Plan (CEAP) 2019–24 [29], ensuring all our UG students are prepared in a developmental and timely manner for the world of work. CEAP provides a coordinated approach across faculties, professional services and UPSU, and is structured around four core objectives:
- A curriculum which develops skills and attributes for employment.
- An accessible, holistic and sustainable Careers Service offer for all students.
- An environment which encourages work-based experience and support for self-employment.
- A managed approach to enhancing employer partnerships and profile.

Student entrepreneurship and start-ups. The South West job market is characterised by high levels of SMEs, self-employment (18% in 2020) and low wages. Companies across the South West region are smaller than average; 114,000 are micro businesses, 12,000 small businesses, 2,000 medium-sized and only 420 are large. This creates a challenge for graduates who wish to remain in the region and has led to the expansion of our support for graduate start-ups and the entrepreneurial skills needed to work in micro businesses. The Cube is our service that supports the development of enterprise skills [30], providing students and graduates with access to entrepreneurs, specialist advice, mentoring, peer-to-peer learning, and high-quality training. The impact of The Cube is demonstrated by the increase over the past few years in the number of graduate start-ups; we were ranked 12th of English HEIs in 2020/21, an increase on previous years (2018/19 47th; 2019/20 31st) [31]. In 2021/22, the student enterprise hub achieved 1,549 student engagements, 89 new start-up business, a turnover of £1.85 million and 164 hours of external specialist time.

3.2.2   Continuation, completion and progression (SO2 and SO3)
The very high rates for continuation, completion and progression, each just above the benchmark overall indicator value, is evidence of the success of our approaches to designing and delivering innovative and engaging programmes (section **2.2.2**), alongside outstanding tailored student support (section **2.3.2**). Our very high rates of successful progression can be attributed to the embedding of both research and employability across our courses, as well as the extensive support given to our students to succeed beyond their studies. Given the challenges of the regional job market (section **3.2.1**), our very high-quality progression indicators could arguably be considered of even higher quality in this context.

Materially below benchmark split indicators for student outcomes. Only 3% of the student outcomes split indicators were materially below benchmark (indicator value 2.5% or more below). Where the proportion of the uncertainty distribution is greater than 80 per cent, we have outlined any reasons for these values and any actions being taken.
- The materially below benchmark indicators for completion and progression in the BSc (Hons) Economics, as well as '*Teaching on my course*' in business and management, reflect challenges in the Plymouth Business School that were identified at the beginning of the current TEF period. In 2019, a Transformation Plan for the Plymouth Business School was initiated, with a completely new and refined undergraduate portfolio, followed by implementation of the

'Twenty-First-Century Curriculum Project' (section **2.2.2**). In addition, to support positive progression, a comprehensive careers curriculum-based enhancement plan was introduced in the School, covering all undergraduate academic stages, and embedded as part of timetabled module delivery. This in-curriculum provision was in addition to all central 'on-demand' Careers Service provision delivered through our Student Hub. Enhanced provision has also been introduced for other disciplines with below benchmark progression indicators, including '*Politics*'.

- The BSc (Hons) Animal Behaviour and Welfare ('*Agriculture food and related studies*') has materially below benchmark progression data. Analysis of the returns show that many students are in roles that require the knowledge and skills from their degree, but the roles are not recognised as positive destinations, e.g. zoos, animal charities.

- The materially below benchmark completion indicators for the small cohorts of FdSc Veterinary Nursing ('*Veterinary sciences*') and FdSc Forensic Science ('*General applied and forensics*') students relates to year 1 and 2 data only and have since resolved.

3.3   Educational gains

3.3.1   University of Plymouth educational gains (SO4)

We have built educational gains into the strategy, mission and vision of the University. The focus on ensuring we deliver significant educational gains is driven by the recognition of the diverse demographics of our student population (section **1.2**). The expected gains for our students are ones that will take them from a diversity of learning backgrounds and develop them through their discipline to become motivated, able, and agile graduates ready for the current and future demands of employers. Our students and staff use the Plymouth Compass (section **1.1**) to help embed development of the graduate attributes that derive from the outcomes of educational gains. The indicators in positive graduate outcomes, which sit just above the benchmark, in themselves speak to the success of our approach. Experiential learning, appropriate formative and summative assessment, employer-focused skills development, and societal engagement, all add to the wealth of graduate features developed in all our students.

One of the Plymouth Compass graduate attributes is to develop each student as a sustainable citizen. The University is recognised as an innovative leader in higher education for sustainability and we were named as one of the top 25 institutions globally in the Times Higher Education Impact Rankings 2021, including 1st in relation to SDG 14: Life Below Water. To embed sustainability in teaching and learning we design and deliver programmes (and short courses) in which the focus is around the Sustainable Development Goals, but also take every opportunity to place education for sustainability into every curriculum and the wider student experience. These instances are characterised by authentic engagement with real issues, by, for example, students working on 'live briefs' with external organisations, undertaking an internship or placement, and by students benefitting from staff research in sustainability. Staff are provided with a range of resources and support for embedding sustainability into the curriculum [32].

3.3.2   Supporting students to achieve (SO5)

Theory of change for educational gains. Our delivery of educational gains is supported by a theory of change (**Table 1**), based on guidance from the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO). This codifies a coordinated and strategic approach across the University over the past ten years or more and ensures that all elements are appropriately supported. Each activity has been referenced to the appropriate section if already included in this submission or can be found below.

Situation
Many students do not make the expected educational gains (improvement in knowledge, skills, work readiness and personal development).

Aims
To equip students with the knowledge, skills and learning to achieve greater educational gains than expected based on entry qualifications.

Inputs
Identify students who need additional support to achieve well.
Analysis of current provision to support students' educational gains.
Work with UPSU and student representation to ensure co-creation.
Engagement with relevant external partners.
Resources – financial, material and staff.

Activities
Early review of engagement and performance to identify students requiring additional support.
Careers Service with Faculties design and deliver activities to support students' employability.
Review current training for staff and identify any gaps. Deliver targeted CPD for staff.
University and UPSU build partnerships with local organisations and communities.
Research relevant to taught content identified and adapted to enable student engagement.

Outputs
Students in need of additional academic and pastoral support are identified and engaged with to improve performance.
Students are better prepared, connected and supported to obtain relevant work experience and improve employability skills and confidence.
Relevant support, advice and training leads to enhanced pedagogic practice.
Provide opportunities for students to engage in KE projects.
Existing research underpins curriculum content with students engaged in current research.

Outcomes
Students feel well supported, have a sense of identity and belonging, and gain increased social and cultural capital.
Students have increased understanding of how to succeed in the graduate employment market.
Students learn to effectively absorb, synthesise, recall and apply learning from their course.
Students are equipped with the professional skills and behaviours required to deliver KE in a variety of settings (businesses, public sector, social enterprises and communities).
Students can gather and analyse credible data, presenting arguments based on the data.

Impact
Increased aspiration, confidence and belief
Career readiness with profession-specific skills
Knowledge – acquisition, application and creation
Civic and societal knowledge exchange
Research skills and critical thinking

Rationale and assumptions
1. There are sufficient resources and staff to deliver the relevant activities and support.
2. Students engage with the activities and programmes.
3. Staff engage with the activities and programmes.

Table 1. *University of Plymouth theory of change for educational gains.*

Increased aspiration, confidence and belief. Raising the aspirations of our students, ensuring they believe they can succeed and providing them with the necessary confidence, is established from the very beginning of their journey with us. Work to support the diverse community of student begins during their Welcome activities (section **2.3.2**), continues throughout their studies and through their graduation and beyond as they pursue their choice of career (section **3.2.1**). These attributes in our students are further developed through extensive experiential learning and support for placements and internships (section **2.3.2** and **3.2.1**), as well as by UPSU across their clubs, societies, and volunteering (section **2.3.4**). The indicators in progression, which are just above the benchmark, provide evidence of success, especially in the context of a diverse student population (section **1.2**).

Career readiness and profession-specific skills. Career Registration (CR) is an annual survey used by more than 80% of UK universities. The survey covers career thinking and readiness of UG students allowing their categorisation into four stages of career readiness or thinking – 'explore', 'plan', 'complete' and 'achieved'. Embedding the survey as part of the enrolment process, and repeating each year, allows both monitoring of the effectiveness of our interventions, and longitudinal segmentation of the student population to ensure additional interventions are appropriately targeted. For example, in the School of Psychology, data show that demand for work experience peaks in the final year when students have the least capacity to undertake it; as a result, their Micro Internships programme was moved into years 1 and 2. Profession-specific skills are developed throughout their studies, either integrated into the programme delivered in the University or in many cases through the placement activity (section **3.2.1**).

Knowledge – acquisition, application and creation. The acquisition of knowledge by our students is largely covered within discipline teaching and learning, aligned to relevant PSRB standards where available, and monitored through our robust QA processes including annual and periodic review to ensure subject-level knowledge is always advancing in parallel with research in that field. The application and creation of knowledge are integral to the curricula for each programme, enhanced through the integration of experiential learning across the institution (section **3.2.1**) and the design of formative and summative assessment for learning (section **2.2.1**).

Civic and societal knowledge exchange. Plymouth is recognised within the sector as a pioneer in the field of student knowledge exchange (KE), supported by securing competitive grant funding. One example is our OfS-funded project, Engaging Students in Knowledge Exchange, ESiKE (2020–22). ESiKE sought to scale up a series of longstanding, successful student KE initiatives by bringing them together under a common umbrella, providing additional funding and ensuring sharing of good practice between projects. We have embedded student KE across all three Faculties as part of our theory of change model for educational gains, further developing student skills and linking our students to the regional jobs market. The University brokers this relationship, ensuring success of the tripartite relationship – student, institution, community stakeholder – with benefits to all parties. Our projects in KE include:

- Plymouth Law Clinic which provides legal guidance to the public, especially vulnerable people. Law students deliver typically 19,000 hours of free supervised law advice to our community per year. Coordinated by law students and supervised by staff, the clinic provides hands on experience for our students and a vital service to the local community. This award-winning service won Best Contribution by a Team of Students in the LawWorks and Attorney General Awards (2020).

- The Centre for Eyecare Excellence, where optometry students typically deliver more than 4,000 patient appointments per year, providing eye care services to the Plymouth community and beyond.
- The iMayflower Virtual Internships Scheme, which pivoted rapidly during the pandemic to offer digital internships at scale to our students.
- Award-winning dentistry outreach through Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise (PDSE), with students providing almost 20,000 appointments per year to those requiring NHS dental care, covering four regions in the South West where there is paucity of NHS dentist provision [33].
- Future Shift, the Low Carbon Devon Internship and Leadership Programme, a three-month fully funded internship opportunity that places our current students or recent graduates within Devon SMEs to work on a low carbon project.
- Plymouth University Professional Opportunities Scheme (PUPOS), an ongoing KE project that creates opportunities for students on the UG Music course to gain relevant experience working with local community organisations, schools and businesses as part of their degree.
- Inspiring Futures which enables students from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Business to engage in KE activities, including real-world business consultancy projects, within the curriculum.

The University has focused on evaluation and understanding the benefits, and barriers, to students undertaking KE. A sample of 1,757 student KE interactions was surveyed over a two-year period (2020–22), focusing on the impact on work readiness and their confidence. Key findings include:
- 98% of Law Clinic students felt more employable as a result of the experience and 63% had more professional level content to add to job applications.
- 90% of iMayflower virtual interns felt they had developed their communication skills and 89% felt more confident.
- 59% of Inspiring Futures students felt their employability skills have been enhanced.

The learning from the evaluation report has been shared with the sector and across the University and we now have a suite of online toolkits which all students and staff can access to prepare students for KE activity and ensure they gain maximum benefit [34].

Research skills and critical thinking. We were the lead institution in a HEFCE Learning Gain Pilot Project '*Employing research methods to measure and characterise learning gain in higher education*', with results published in 2018 [35]. This work, which highlighted the benefits of teaching research skills and critical thinking, was embedded widely within the University resulting in significant enhancement to the existing teaching and learning in this area. Our above benchmark progression to further study demonstrates the effectiveness of our design and delivery of research-led programmes (section **2.2.2**). This approach also supports our students to become resilient thinkers who can accommodate contrary, and potentially, discomforting views, and promote the development of counter arguments. Through supporting our academic staff to deliver excellent research and education, we ensure research is fully embedded in education for all our students.

3.3.3   Evaluating educational gains (SO6)

The progress of a student from entry to the University through to professional career or further study can be considered a measure of educational gains. This 'distance travelled' is particularly important for us and we have therefore attempted to define a quantitative measure of educational gains, in support of the above qualitative data, also allowing comparison across the sector. We have used entry tariff as a suitable proxy for entry to University as it reflects both prior educational

attainment and likely educational deficit (lack of privilege etc). Entry qualifications for graduating 2019/20 FT UG UK domiciled first degree students were determined from HEIDI data to enable sector comparison, measured against the 2019/20 GO survey data as a summary of the level of educational gains achieved. The latest GO sector data were used to track FT UG students throughout the TEF period, the majority commencing a three-year degree in 2017/18, as an experimental metric. Sector data looked at HEI providers within the GO survey results and excluded the Open University. We recognise this metric will have caveats and ideally GO data would be directly linked with entry tariff at student level for the sector. Our results show our entry tariffs for this cohort were lower than the sector average (117pts vs 124pts) while positive destinations for the same cohort are higher than the sector average (77.7% vs 73.9%). The data in **Figure 2** demonstrate we are within the top 20% of providers when used as one indicator of educational gains, and we therefore consider this to be an excellent performance for this measure.
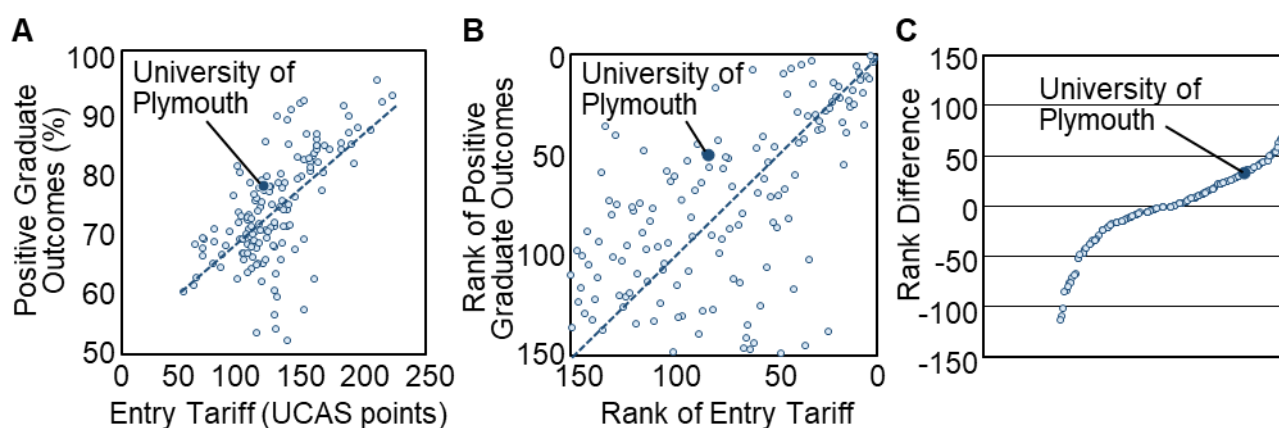

Figure 2. A – *Correlation between entry tariff (UCAS points; 2019/20 graduates) and positive graduate outcomes for the same population. This graph shows a broad distribution of data points, but with a positive correlation, and the University of Plymouth above the correlation line for positive graduate outcomes. **B** – Rank of measures set to highlight gains assuming a direct 1:1 relationship between entry tariff and positive outcomes. This graph shows a broad distribution of data points, but with a positive correlation, with the University of Plymouth above the correlation line for rank of positive graduate outcomes. **C** – Absolute difference in rank between positive graduate outcomes and entry tariff for all providers. This graph shows the University of Plymouth has a positive rank difference, ranking in the top 20% of providers.*

4. Teaching excellence at the University of Plymouth

Our clear institutional culture, focused on the delivery of teaching excellence, is reflected in our strategies and policies. The continuous monitoring of quality assurance with integration of the student voice throughout, linked to key institutional decision-making, ensures the impact of a whole institution approach to supporting an excellent student experience and outcomes. Throughout this submission we have evidenced our approaches to ensuring we meet the mission of the University of Plymouth – to deliver outstanding education that makes a difference, improving local, national, and global communities. The consistent performance above benchmark, with numerous examples of outstanding student experience and outcomes, is testament to the institution-wide approach taken to embedding research-led, engaging, innovative teaching and experiential learning. This is coupled with excellent learning resources and a tailored approach to student support, giving every student the opportunity to achieve their potential, and has resulted in exceptional educational gains.

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