

Teaching Excellence Framework 2023

As the President of Chester Students' Union, I am confident that the student voice is at the heart of all decision making at the University of Chester. Students have the opportunity to feed back on their student experience from course level using the Student Voice Representative system, through their elected officers at university-wide committees, including University Senate. Chester Students' Union are proud to have co-created this TEF submission in collaboration with the University of Chester, as we recognise the dedication that the University has towards improving the student experience and taking the student voice on board.

- President, Chester Students' Union, December 2022

Provider context

Since 1839 our Mission has been **Founded in Faith – Creating Community – Serving Society**ⁱ. At the heart of the University's vision is an unwavering commitment to ensuring an outstanding student learning experience, developing the expertise of staff, providing teaching excellence, and actively growing research, knowledge exchange and scholarship. The way that we deliver our outstanding student learning experience has changed over the years, but those founding principles of creating communities and serving society continues to drive our student-centred approach.

Our foundational values drive us to support students from all backgrounds, especially the most disadvantaged, to access and succeed in higher education. Of our undergraduate population, around 30% come from quintiles 1 and 2 in the indices of multiple deprivation, 20% report having a disability, 10% identify as BAME and since 2018, approximately 50% of our annual intake has been the first in their family to attend university. To enable this diverse population to succeed, we emphasise small group teaching and have a well-developed and structured pastoral and academic support system which deeply embeds both academic and employability skills into the curriculum.

We are a thriving community of over 15,000 students, supported by 1,500 academic and professional support staff. For many years we have been committed to creating communities and serving societies across Cheshire and at our professional centres in Birkenhead, Shrewsbury and Warrington. Our portfolio ranges from medicine to engineering and from art and design to business; crucially, we are serving society through educating the essential public sector workforce in education, health, social work and policing; emphasising the work that we were set up to do.

In 2020, our mission and values were renewed when,

we developed our Citizen Student

Strategyⁱⁱ. The three pillars of our strategy - building social capital, delivering a holistic student experience and pursuing genuine lifelong learning - ensure that our foundational values are as relevant today as they were almost 200 years ago. We want our students and graduates to be positive agents for change in their workplaces and their communities. Realising that ambition means understanding the multitude of backgrounds that our students are drawn from and equipping them with the tools that they need, building their confidence to navigate a complex and ever-changing world.

We know that we deliver an outstanding student learning experience because our students in all their diversity, regardless of background, entry tariff, subject or centre have great and equitable outcomes.

About this submission

This submission illustrates that our success in delivering an excellent academic experience and supporting our students' achievements is derived from the collaborative community of academic enquiry that is built and maintained by our students and our staff. By living and learning alongside each other, we challenge our students to reach their full potential and they challenge us to continually enhance our approach to learning and teaching. Through these relationships, the University lives out its Citizen Student Strategy.

Our submission is arranged into sections focussing on student experience and student outcomes. We outline our broad approach at institutional level, give examples of how our strategies and initiatives are implemented respecting disciplinary differences and we explain the impact of these for distinct groups of students. Throughout, we cross-refer to corresponding sections within our submission; these appear in the text as hyperlinks.

Working with students as partners in the co-creation of their experience is a guiding principle of our student engagement strategy. This partnership approach underpins our approach to this submission. The selection and presentation of the examples of excellent practice described in this submission has been undertaken by students and staff, both academic and professional, from across the University.

The student voice is reflected throughout this document, including via direct contributions from Students' Union officers, input from student panels and focus groups, reference to institutional and national student surveys, and feedback from Governing Body, Senate and their key sub-committees which all include student representation.

Student Experience

Since being granted University title in 2005 we have grown both in geographical reach and in the range of disciplines we offer. Our strategic expansion has ensured that we continue to serve the diverse economic needs of the regions in which we operate, whilst always delivering on our commitment to the very highest quality academic experience for our students.

The theme of our submission is the supportive academic community that our staff and our students create together, within which our students are challenged to realise their full potential. This is evidenced in the responses to the National Student Survey questions on Learning Community. Between 2017 and 2020 around 80% of the students who responded in each year said that they were satisfied with the learning community created by the University. When the fabric of our community was disrupted by the pandemic, our students felt the loss of the in-person interactions which are so vital to our personalised approach.

We worked hard to mitigate the worst effects of the enforced separation from each other. When we polled our students in the autumn of 2020, 79% of respondents agreed with the statement '*the University is doing all that it could to minimise the impact of COVID on my studies*'. Analysis of the JISC Digital Insights Survey run in December 2021 (where we had the fourth highest response rate) shows that when asked about the level of support we gave for digital and online learning, our students consistently felt more supported compared to the average for all participating institutionsⁱⁱⁱ.

Throughout the period covered by this submission, the majority of our student experience indicators in every mode, including those relating to specific student characteristics, are either

broadly in-line with or materially above our benchmark. Whilst we are not complacent, there can be no clearer evidence of our commitment to supporting our students, whatever their background. This section of our submission looks at our strengths and gives illustrative examples of the diverse range of approaches employed by our highly qualified staff to ensure that our students don't just succeed but have a rich and rewarding academic experience whilst doing so.

Academic experience and assessment

Our Citizen Student Strategy commits us to deliver for each student, an academic experience that is purposeful, personalised and premium. To do this across our multidisciplinary, multi-site University, we work from our shared understanding of what it means to be a Citizen Student:

A citizen is a participatory member of a community. A citizen student is someone who contributes to the University and wider community as an engaged learner.

Alongside this shared definition, we know that contribution and engagement can take many forms depending on the character of each student, on the subject they study and the different knowledge and skills that they will need to shape their future. Our Learning and Teaching Strategy^{iv} and, more recently, our Citizen Student Education Plan, provides a strong foundation from which our staff can tailor their approach according to the needs of their subject and their students.

Teaching

All students at the University of Chester benefit from engagement with staff who are at the forefront of pedagogical practice with the latest data available from HESA, showing that 95.2% of the University's academic staff hold a recognised teaching qualification. This is the highest of any broad-based University in England, Wales and Northern Ireland^v.

Our highly skilled academic staff work within the framework of our Learning and Teaching Strategy which in 2018 was shortlisted for The Times Higher Leadership and Management Awards 'Teaching and Learning Strategy of the Year'^{vi}. Educational leadership and implementation of the strategy is coordinated by our Centre for Academic Innovation and Development (CAID) which was previously called the Learning and Teaching Institute.

The Learning and Teaching strategy sets a clear direction and expectations, but we embrace diversity and innovation and actively encourage our course teams to implement it in ways that are appropriate to the contexts of their discipline and their students. CAID appoints University Innovation Fellows (formerly Senior University Teaching Fellows) who work on key change projects, driven by the University but which, to succeed, must be introduced sympathetically at Faculty and discipline level. In taking this approach, we create an inclusive community and environment for scholarly teaching and an ethos which supports teachers to develop their practice and thrive.

We believe that our positive TEF indicators demonstrate the success that we have had in implementing the six aims of the Learning and Teaching Strategy; discussed below. They outline that the impact of the strategy has been the consistently excellent educational experience that our students have told us that they receive.

Strengthening our use of analysis of outcomes and trends in transition, progression and achievement

In 2018, we were ahead of the sector in redeveloping our approach to monitoring quality; moving away from a traditional 'one-size-fits-all' approach to a model that is data-led and risk-based.

Through our 'Continuous Monitoring of Enhancement' (CME) process, we have replaced an annual review point with a requirement to engage in analysis of trends in data throughout the academic year. Course teams evaluate feedback from students along with their educational outcomes in real-time and maintain a quality improvement action plan in response. Using internal and external benchmarks, at the institutional level we 'flag' subject areas where performance is not as strong as we would like it to be. Subject areas identified in this way present their quality improvement plans to a special meeting of the Academic Leadership Group and they are then supported to make positive and meaningful change. If this is not possible, a range of management interventions are considered which may include closing the provision.

Case Study: Enhancing student satisfaction in Journalism

At the 2018 NSS 66.4% of respondents from the subject expressed satisfaction with the quality of teaching on their course, below a threshold acceptable to the University. The course team engaged consistently with the CME process by completing the quality improvement plan and taking part in reviews by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities Board of Study. In response, student satisfaction measured through this question increased over the period to stand at 81.3% in NSS 2021.

Promoting innovation, imagination and creativity in the design, content and delivery of inclusive teaching, learning and assessment

With such a diversity of disciplines on offer across the University, our strong team of University Innovation Fellows take a lead in ensuring that good practice is shared, and that staff networks are maintained so everyone remains connected. Through the busy academic year, we do this primarily through our online practice exchange network, the Teaching and Learning Community (TLC). Over the review period, the TLC has also led to the initiation of several staff-led networks including the SaP Chat: The Students as Partners Institutional Network, promoting and supporting student-staff partnership and the Curriculum Offering Radical Innovation Space network (CORIS), which constructively challenges and innovates institutional practices.

Through CAID, the University has also made available small grants for innovations in teaching practice. Projects funded through these grants have included tailoring teaching to meet the needs of BTEC entrants, strategies for developing soft skills in science subjects and the use of digital immersive technologies for teaching. In this latter example, the project led directly to the development of the staff-led Experimenting with Digital and Immersive Technologies (EDIT) Group, which draws staff from different disciplines to examine best practice virtual and augmented reality in teaching and learning. The work of this group was instrumental in the AdvanceHE award winning [Enhancing Fieldwork Learning \(EFL\) project](#).

Our staff networks are crucial to ensuring that innovative teaching practice is developed and recognised all year round. A focal point for their work and discussions comes each summer, with our Learning and Teaching Conference. Attended by more than 200 staff each year, the conference benefits from high-profile external speakers and presentations on diverse topics from approaches to flipped classroom teaching, facilitating real world and immersive assessment and decolonising the curriculum.

We know that the TLC seminars and webinars, the other staff-led networks and the conference often act as a catalyst for innovations across the University.

Case study: Authentic assessment

A conference session on authentic assessment contributed to a project by the University's Westminster Centre for Research in Ageing looking at synergies between spiral curriculum approaches and problem-based learning. In the pilot, undergraduate students were introduced and reintroduced to a fictional family with links to a veteran. As familiarity with the family increased, the more complex the health presentations arising across the whole family became. The pilot initiative coincided with a significant increase in the proportion of students in Health Studies disciplines responding positively to the statement 'the course is intellectually stimulating' from 71.43% in NSS 2018 to 91.67% in NSS 2022.

Developing and enhancing of partnership activity with students, academia, industry and the community

Around half of our new undergraduate students each year are the first in their family to enter higher education, so creating connections for them is crucial as a means of building their social capital. In the most recent Knowledge Exchange Framework exercise, we performed above our benchmark and were in the fifth (highest) quintile for working with business for our cluster. This work raises the profile of our graduates to high-quality employers in our region and beyond and we continue to develop our approach to industry links. In recent months we have begun the process of merging our Business and Science Faculties to support the development of the Cheshire Science Corridor Enterprise Zone and showing students how they can play a role in regional economic 'green' growth and productivity. Later in this submission, we outline how we use these employer links to ensure that [students gain the skills](#) they will need to secure positive progression outcomes.

Having the connections to employers is an important starting point, but given the diverse nature of our student community, breaking down barriers so that everyone has a fair opportunity to exploit those links is vital. The University is proud to be a member of the Purpose Coalition; where business, health providers, local authorities and universities come together to find practical solutions to the problem of poor social mobility. Through our Workplace Experiences scheme^{vii} (our collective of placements, internships and project scholarships) we undertook a project to implement an anonymous application process which put what a student could do and how they could develop ahead of who they were and what they had done. As one of the employers taking part in the scheme said "I believe that regardless of how hard you try, it's impossible to avoid subconscious bias or overcompensation in the efforts to avoid bias. The anonymous application removed this as a thought process and ensured that we chose our candidate without the process being impacted by bias."^{viii} We have used the same approach to recruiting students to some paid positions in the University.

Embedding of academic and employability skills in the curriculum

Supporting students into meaningful employment is a crucial part of our work. More than a quarter of our undergraduate students are registered on regulated courses leading to employment in the health, social care, policing and teaching professions. Further below, we outline how our course design philosophy is ensuring that all our students develop the skills and attributes that employers demand. We will also explain how our distinctive and long-standing [Work-Based Learning](#) approach gives students the opportunity to experience graduate level employment.

Evidence from our [Career Readiness survey](#) consistently demonstrates the positive impact these have in raising student confidence. For example, in 2018-19, of the students just starting Level 4, 20% reported that they were uncertain about their career thinking. Two years later, the students

starting Level 6 were surveyed and 90% said that they had either determined their career path or were proactively working towards doing so.

As well as employability, further on in this submission we will also foreground the significant enhancements we have made to the provision of [academic support](#), encompassing the embedding and development of key academic skills. Through our combination of personalised support and in-curriculum skills development, our approach ensures that students are equipped to succeed from the start of their experience with us.

Providing and supporting pedagogic and discipline specific development opportunities

Before the pandemic, we were already focussing staff development and pedagogic approaches on technology enhanced learning. This preparation meant that in March 2020, CAID was able to quickly develop and present a range of resources for teaching staff to incorporate into their practice. Our University Innovation Fellows ensured that our academic community remained connected by facilitating Faculty specific and University wide discussion groups, explaining and promoting the use of interactive platforms and online social collaboration tools to improve engagement in online sessions and foster inclusive learning environments. Our Learning Technology Development Unit ran workshops and training for all staff as well as creating self-service materials in the form of a knowledgebase, live online events and one-to-one support.

Case study: Creating socially connected communities online

The onset of the pandemic accelerated our response through piloting a specific learning platform (Aula) with our Health and Social Care students. Originally, the aim of this project was to connect our Nursing students and practitioners who are often geographically spread across Cheshire, Merseyside and Shropshire. The innovative approaches developed were presented at the 2021 Learning and Teaching Conference jointly by academic staff and our Senior Learning Technologist. The evaluation of the pilot concluded that we could achieve the same learning design with a better range of functionality by using a combination of Microsoft Teams with our existing virtual learning environment, Moodle. We have outlined [below](#) how the learning we took from this project has benefited students across the University.

In the summer of 2021, a year into the pandemic, 70.45% of respondents to the NSS agreed that they had been able to access the physical and digital learning resources they needed for their course. Although an outstanding achievement in the circumstances, we went still further. By implementing the learning that we had done throughout 2020-21, we continued to improve students' access and as noted above, 80% of the respondents to the JISC Digital Capabilities Survey in December 2021 agreed that the University had acted positively to minimise the impact of the pandemic on their learning.

Delivering appropriate learning environments – both the enhancement of physical accommodation for extant and new provision, and support for the development of individual digital capabilities

Since 2017 we have invested over £11.5million in capital projects to enhance the learning environment for our students. This includes an augmented reality suite for our healthcare students, enabling them to practise skills in a range of scenarios and advanced simulated healthcare environments. In this latter case, students can be assessed on competencies that are often difficult to complete in traditional practice settings (such as blood transfusions) and we expect that this will translate to improved continuation rates. The University has also led on a Health Education England funded project to increase to skills sport to students on placement. The Outreach Skills Clinic Assessment (OSCA) is made available through the 'Digital On Tour'

initiative, taking digital learning resources and media to students across Cheshire and Merseyside. In addition, we have a digital hub for simulation used in police education in our Warrington Centre which was funded by the Borough and supported by Cheshire Constabulary.

Case study: Digitally enhanced teaching and learning

Led by our Department of Geography and Environment^{ix}, we are creating the learning environments of the future. Working with academics from the Universities of Reading and Sheffield, the Enhancing Fieldwork Learning project examines ways in which technology can make fieldwork more accessible to students in a cost-effective way. Awarded an AdvanceHE Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (CATE), the judges commended the “multi-institutional and multi-disciplinary collaboration which demonstrated a transformational impact on attitudes towards the use of technology to enhance fieldwork learning”.

‘Digital Skills’ weeks to the end of each term, offering students a range of opportunities to develop their digital literacy and skills. The first of these weeks, delivered 16 sessions with a total of 2,048 student registrations on workshops including optimising use of Microsoft Office applications, developing digital reading skills and learning about virtual internships. Digital Skills weeks have developed to include courses from our growing online video library and making use of our institutional membership of LinkedIn Learning.

Further enhancing our practice

Our existing practice meant we had a solid foundation upon which to mount our pandemic response and we worked closely in partnership with our students. We ensured they had access to the equipment they needed through our Digital Inclusion Fund, and we partnered with the Chester Students’ Union throughout:

We collaborated with the University to make sure that the student experience is at the forefront of all decision making. We ensured that students were supported and welcomed the introduction of the Digital Inclusion Fund which was well received. We also worked with the University to implement a No-Detriment policy, followed by the Safety Net policy in the following year. This ensured that students were not disadvantaged by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on their work. Sabbatical officers sat down with the University to co-create these policies, allowing the student voice to be at the heart of the decision making. (Chester Students’ Union, December 2022)

Through our enhanced approach to Flexible Digital Education, we are building on the work did before and during the pandemic by creating baseline expectations for high-quality digital learning material which supplements our in-person teaching. One of the baselines has been derived from the work we did on the [Aula project](#) to ensure that all courses have interactive digital content.

Case study: interactive digital content

Dance is not a discipline which naturally lends itself to online learning. However, after the implementation of an advanced H5P toolkit within Moodle, the course team, in collaboration with a Learning Technologist and a graduate, developed an online catalogue of dance phrases for students to engage with at their own pace and incorporate into their own practise. An H5P tool was used to breakdown photographs showing the dance phrases into micro-components which are recombined into an animated sequence so that students can examine complex positioning and movement in far more detail than would be possible in a ‘real-world’ environment.

In June 2021, we won the Excellence in Digital Innovation award at the What Uni Student Choice Awards^x. The award was introduced by the judging panel to “highlight institutions that developed innovative and impactful digital solutions to improve the student experience and increase digital accessibility during Covid-19”. This endorsement of our work sits alongside the validation of our students in their responses to the NSS over the last five years. In response to two questions in the teaching quality section (“staff are good at explaining things” and “staff have made the subject interesting”), the University has outperformed the sector in three of the last five years. In our view, this is demonstrative of the very high-quality approach that has been embedded across all the discipline areas that make up the University and gives us confidence in our future direction.

Assessment and feedback

We believe that assessment should be for, as well as of, learning. The process of preparing and submitting assessments enables our students to showcase knowledge and skills that they have developed and which they will need in their future careers. As one of our recent graduates put it:

The lecturers are able to provide constructive feedback, guide assessments and encourage students to achieve high marks. Most of the lecturers will [go] out of the way and provide extra study sessions or time to go through any assignments and break them down so that they are easy to understand. (NSS 2020)

In 2018, we carried out a comprehensive review of our assessment strategy. We took a holistic view of how students are assessed, ensuring that our approach further enhanced authenticity to support employability and continued to demonstrate rigour and stretch. The review looked at our practice across four broad areas: assessment volume and type, timing and process, marking and feedback and teaching for and about assessment. We engaged staff and students to examine our approaches in each of these areas and to consider ways in which they could be enhanced.

One output of the review was an update to our University-wide generic marking criteria. Developed by practitioners in CAID in collaboration with our academics, the purpose of the criteria is to promote consistency between disciplines, maintain equitability and standards across subjects and promote transparency for students. When setting assessments, staff select relevant elements of the generic criteria and adapt them to fit the task. The review further enhanced the status of the criteria by consolidating the expectation of ‘assessment launches’ within all modules to introduce students to the assessments they will undertake and what is expected of them.

The positive impact of this approach is evident in what our students tell us. Each year, the University invites students to complete an evaluation for each module they have studied. In response to the statement “I understood what was expected of me from the assessment brief and marking criteria” 84.45% of respondents agreed. We considered that this positive feedback was reinforced in the National Student Survey in relation to questions 8 which asks students to state the extent to which they agree with the statement “the criteria used in marking have been clear in advance”. In each year between 2018 and 2022, the University has outperformed the sector with the average percentage agree score over this period being 2.5 percentage points (ppt) higher.

Our consistent institutional-wide approach to setting expectations is augmented by the wrap-around of personalised support for assessment. Students receive feedback which is related to the authentic nature of assessments ensuring that it will be valuable, not just in achieving higher grades, but also supporting them to succeed in their chosen field.

Case studies: Peer supported feedback

Computer Science take an active approach to feedback by asking students to peer review anonymised work from previous students and derive a mark. The work is then discussed with the group in light of the actual mark and feedback awarded which helps students contextualise the expectations of their own work. In Spanish, a similar peer support initiative is embedded through all four years of the course. This sees students interacting with their peers from different year groups to support understanding of and engagement with reflective portfolio work which has extended to the creation, with tutor support, of their own app.

The impact of this tailored approach to feedback is evidenced in responses to the NSS. Question 11 asks students the extent to which they agree that “I have received helpful comments on my work”. Between 2018 and 2022 the University has consistently been ahead of the sector with the average percentage agree score over the period being 3.7 PPT higher. Moreover, our peers concur that our approach is the right one. An analysis of the overviews compiled following receipt of the External Examiner reports between 2018 and 2021 demonstrates that the quality of feedback was consistently praised in more than 600 of them. Indeed, in a report from the 2021 academic year, one of our External Examiners said that feedback was “so cheerful and effective that even fails felt like a learning opportunity.”^{xi}

Consistently materially above benchmark, our assessment and feedback indicators demonstrate that our approaches to supporting students to succeed are outstanding. Behind the numbers, the value of what we do can be found in what our students experience throughout their studies:

The feedback teachers give back on drafts is extremely helpful and the speed at which they check work and send it back is a big bonus also. I love the flexibility of being able to contact any of the lecturers; if I have a question about a module and want to ask a different lecturer to the one teaching me, I feel comfortable in doing so and I really like this. (NSS 2022)

Course content and delivery

Our Citizen Student Strategy commits us to developing and delivering courses which equip students with the current knowledge and skills that employers demand and those that will help drive the economy and their success in the future. It also means working in partnership with our students, to understand the evolving ways in which they study and want to access learning. For these reasons we take an integrated and comprehensive approach to curriculum design and delivery.

Our students have a wide and rich variety of perspectives, and our course teams ensure that all shades of opinion can be expressed in the design and development of courses. This extends from routine engagements through Staff Voice Meetings (previous Staff-Student Liaison Meetings), to finding new ways of engaging students who may be physically at a distance from the University for some of the time.

Student partnership in the design of courses is crucial to our success in creating a community of engaged learners who want to be stretched and challenged. In a recent modification to courses in Education, students identified the importance of content relating to special needs education,

especially for those looking to pursue a PGCE after graduation which led to the development of a new core module. In another example, working with our strategic alliance partner, University Centre Reaseheath to support their development of a new science Foundation Degree in Canine Behaviour and Training, responses to a student questionnaire and discussion group highlighted the need to include content about clinical behaviour and, with an eye to careers after graduation, business management. Both points led the course team to review the proposed content and to make alterations to ensure that these student needs were addressed.

After the development phase, students remain integral to decisions on whether new courses should be approved. Each proposal is reviewed by an expert panel of internal staff and external advisors, and each has a student reviewer appointed on the same terms as the academic members. Since the introduction of our new risk-based approach to course approval in 2019/20 we have engaged students as expert reviewers, providing input and commentary on a wide range of course proposals. Analysis of approval reports from the last two years shows that their impact has been swift with a third of student submissions already resulting in actionable feedback in the form of required or recommended actions to course teams.

Working collaboratively with students supports an outstanding academic experience. Through this, we engage and stretch individuals to develop knowledge and skills by linking learning to careers and life beyond higher education. An important component of this approach is the work of our Careers and Employability Service, in partnership with academics, to embed employability skills into the curriculum, whilst also making the development of those skills visible to students.

Case studies: embedding employability skills

In our English provision, students and staff work together to co-create materials and publications for our wider community, whether that is our student body, the local community or industry partners. This work is embedded across a suite of employability-led modules which students can opt to study. These include, for example, *Language at Work* in which student assessment includes 120 hours of placement with an industry partner resulting in the compilation of a portfolio of work designed to demonstrate critical awareness of each students' skills as a potential professional employee.

Our Computer Science staff have nurtured links with a local employer to support the development authentic assessment opportunities. In one example with Sykes Cottages, a series of assignments enabled groups of students to work on design and development tasks, including accessibility audits of the company website, UX experience projects etc. The employer is proactively involved in the projects, holding meetings and providing feedback to students throughout. This approach enables students to augment the typical technical Computer Skills that they learn throughout the course with more creative and soft skills by working on collaborative projects with an employer.

Even where specific employment is a course aim in its own right, such as our regulated, professional courses, we go further to support students to accelerate their careers. For example, in recent years staff from our Faculty of Health and Social Care led the way on the development of a practice learning strategy for Cheshire and Merseyside as an output from an Enabling Effective Learning Environments project. Drawing together stakeholders from across the region, the strategy aims to enhance students experience of placement learning. This approach enables us to respond quickly to regional demand. For example, we recently introduced Nursing to our professional education centre in Shrewsbury, focussing on digital and rural health to support growth and upskilling the healthcare workforce of Shropshire.

The rich and diverse ways in which our courses engage students in their learning and challenge them to achieve their full potential has been widely recognised. In 2019, at the Educate North Awards, the excellence of our provision was commended through our success in five categories: social mobility, business collaboration and partnerships, external relations, international partnerships and teaching excellence^{xiii}. Beyond the validation of our peers, our students validate our success; for example, through their responses to the UK Engagement Survey which is completed by our undergraduates (excluding those who complete the NSS) each year. In response to the statement “the course challenged you to do your best work” first year cohorts since 2018 agreed at a range between 75% and 88%. By the end of the second year, the proportion of students in the tracked cohort agreeing with the statement increased by between 4ppt and 13ppt.

Research informed teaching and employer engagement

Our approach to supporting students to achieve meaningful [educational gains](#) is grounded in our ability to open doors to rewarding careers in our region. We have previously referred to the recognition of our success in working with local employers in the last [Knowledge Exchange Framework](#). In the Research Excellence Framework 2021, we increased in all areas, including our grade point average and research power to sit second of the institutions in the Cathedrals Group^{xiv}.

Students benefit from teaching at the cutting edge of the latest research and innovation. For example, established in 2016 through philanthropic support, the Philip Barker Centre for Creative Learning brings together students and practitioners across disciplinary boundaries to explore the role of the creative arts in the service of society. A collaboration between our Faculties of Health and Social Care, Medicine and Life Sciences and Arts and Humanities saw the creation of a Creative Health placement for nursing and midwifery students. The placement attracted significant national interest with site visits from the Deputy Chief Nursing Officer NHS England and representatives from the National Centre for Creative Health, which is profiling this project on a national level. The Centre has contributed to the Faculty of Education, facilitating creative music making and song writing workshops during induction week to develop relationships, social capital and a sense of belonging amongst students; all key aims of the Citizen Student Strategy.

Committed to producing graduates ready to serve society, we have links with 32 Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies which either regulate access to professions, such as the Nursing and Midwifery Council, or which accredit our courses to give graduates a competitive edge, such as the recognition of our Cyber Security courses by the Chartered Institute of Information Security^{xv}. Through these affiliations, our courses develop the knowledge and skills that employers require. In our Accounting and Finance provision, by aligning with requirements from no fewer than four professional bodies, our students receive the maximum number exemptions from professional examinations after graduation, giving them a head-start in their careers.

Case study: Entrepreneurial Education

The work of Chester Business School exemplifies our approach. Shortlisted for the 2022 Times Higher Education Business School of the Year award^{xvi}, the Chester Business School is the academic lead for HyNet North West^{xvii}, supporting the UK's effort to become carbon neutral by 2050. Through the Santander sponsored Young Enterprise initiatives, undergraduate students in the School benefit from subject-matched alumni mentoring in employability so that they are business-ready graduates, able to take advantage of the careers we are supporting the local economy to generate.

Resources, support and student engagement

In this section, we explain how we work in partnership across our community of academic staff, pedagogical experts and students to create an environment in which everyone can thrive.

Professional development and excellent academic practice

Our commitment to ensuring that our students benefit from the best pedagogical thinking is underscored by the fact that 95.2% of our academic staff hold a [recognised teaching qualification](#). We also contractually require new staff, who join us without prior teaching experience to join one of our suite of teaching development courses. Through CAID staff are directed to multiple routes to formal recognition through Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy and other accredited courses. These include Teaching and Learning Essentials for New Teachers (TaLENT) Chester Enhancement and Recognition of Teaching Scheme (CERTS) and our Postgraduate Certificate Teaching and Learning in Higher Education which is accredited by AdvanceHE. For established teachers, our approach to peer observation, which is observee led, provides an annual opportunity to reflect and further develop classroom expertise in a supportive and collegiate way.

Beyond this formal recognition, we have already outlined how our [internal pedagogic networks](#) enable staff to explore new approaches to teaching and share their experiences with others. We have also outlined how our annual Learning and Teaching Conference breaks down disciplinary boundaries for staff to showcase their work. Since 2018, over 90 presentations and workshops have taken place at the conference and, from their feedback, academic staff see the benefit of it

I learnt most from C4 [one of the workshops], especially the presentation including Claire House which introduced soft skills gleaned from experience which could be passed on to our students. (2019 Learning & Teaching Conference participant)

It was the most compelling conference yet. All the presentations were relevant to the new challenges we are facing. (2020 Learning & Teaching Conference participant)

In previous years, the Learning and Teaching Conference has also been the focal point for recognition of outstanding teaching. A judging panel comprised of our CAID and the University Innovation Fellows have awarded prizes for innovation in categories such as 'teaching team of the year', 'innovative teacher of the year', 'positive change' and 'learning leader of the year.

Case study: The 1839 Awards

Developed and hosted annually by the Chester Students' Union, the '1839 Awards' provide a strong example of a student-led initiative to reward and incentivise excellent teaching, learning and student support. These awards allow students to celebrate academic and professional staff who have had a positive impact on their University experience. Students can nominate staff in categories such as 'Outstanding Personal Academic Tutor', 'Most Inspiring Lecturer', 'Most Helpful Feedback', and 'Outstanding Academic Support Staff'. The numbers of individual nominations received from students ranged from 425 (2021/22) up to 560 (2017/18). Nominations are shortlisted by the Students' Union 'Student Council', and winners are then chosen by a panel of elected sabbatical officers.

Academic support

We maintain a careful balance of academic support that is located within our academic departments and faculties, complemented by centrally available resources. This ensures that all

students, have access to the tools that they need to meet and exceed our rigorous academic standards.

Supporting students even before they start their course ensures that they can make smooth transitions into higher education; to facilitate this, all students have access to our Pre-Arrival Student Site (PASS) prior to enrolment. As well as providing practical information about the University and the services we offer, PASS contains tailored information specific to each student's subject and course (reading lists, equipment requirements etc.) ensuring that students are ready to engage with us from day one.

Personalised support

Each of our students is allocated a Personal Academic Tutor (PAT); they are a named contact for support and guidance. The PAT also acts as a coach, checking in with each student regularly throughout their time at the University and motivating them to succeed.

In recent years, we recognised that some of our students, require further support to help them successfully transition to University. This has led to a pilot scheme on the early allocation of PATs, prior to enrolment, for students with a declared disability. The Faculty of Health and Social Care looked at the impact of the initiative in the summer of 2022.

The evaluation reported that students involved in the pilot felt that the early allocation of a PAT had eased their anxiety about starting University and staff were also positive about the scheme which has been expanded and will include all departments from September 2023.

Support for learning

The Academic Skills team (ASk) works with students and academic colleagues across the University, ensuring that all students can benefit from academic skills development appropriate to their needs, whether on an individual basis or through their course curriculum.

Using a collaborative practice model, academic staff and the ASk team work together on the design and dissemination of resources to support in-module academic skills development. This comprehensive set of resources is used by staff across the University to assist students to acquire these crucial skills in ways that are context-specific to their discipline. Additionally, since the start of the 2017/18 academic year, the ASk team has worked with colleagues to co-deliver 1,870 skills sessions to students. Our internal data for the past two years shows that whilst there has been a higher uptake of these in the sciences and health-related subjects, the team's reach extends across the whole University.

The impact of the work of the ASk team and their partnership with our academic experts can be seen from staff comments about the engaging ways in which the acquisition and development of critical study skills is explained and delivered by the team.

The students found your style of delivery and presentation content very helpful. We discussed it [critical reflection] after the lunch break and there was a lot of positive energy flowing. (Senior Lecturer, Institute of Policing)

As well as these pan-University resources, the ASk team also offer personalised support to students. Bespoke sessions, delivered in-person or online, cover a range of literacy, numeracy and general study skills. Students can self-refer to ASk or may be counselled to do so by members of staff. Just as our academic staff recognise the value of the ASk team, so do our students:

I worked with an Academic Skills Adviser to familiarise myself with designing presentations. She was always friendly, approachable and knowledgeable. It gave me the knowledge and confidence to produce impressive PowerPoint presentations for my assessment presentations and save me lots of time so that I could focus on my research.

Our community has grown with the opening of professional education centres in Birkenhead, Shrewsbury and Warrington town centre. With our expanded reach comes a commitment to ensuring that outstanding academic support is available to all our students, wherever they are and whenever they need it. The ASk team is resourced to provide their outstanding support at all our sites. In addition, we are investing around £174,000 annually to provide the Studiosity platform, ensuring that students have access to high-quality study support 24/7.

Maintaining standards and supporting students

We support all our students by ensuring that the awards we have made in previous years and those we will make in the future are reliable indicators of what our graduates know and can do. A key component of our approach in this area is our Academic Integrity Policy^{xviii}. The revised policy was the product of a careful and detailed consultation conducted in partnership between academic staff and the Chester Students' Union.

Based around basic concepts of honesty and fair play, the policy sets out our overall expectation of respect for oneself, peers, other academics and scholars by doing nothing that gives the potential to gain an unfair advantage in assessment. From the outset, we were determined to take an educationally led approach, putting the development of good academic practice ahead of punitive sanctions. This was supported by our research which strongly suggested that problems such as plagiarism, reusing previously submitted work and collusion, which whilst still a threat to our academic standards, were more likely to be caused by a lack of academic confidence and maturity

rather than an intention to mislead. In a report by one of the Chief External Examiners, the University was praised for what were referred to as “sector leading developments in support students to improve their understanding of academic good practice”^{xix}.

By distinguishing between those things that students may do in error and those which strongly imply an intention to cheat, we protect the interests of all of our students and graduates. Safeguarding the value of our awards, we decisively sanction acts of misconduct such as contract cheating and use of artificial intelligence. However, where students have mistakenly fallen into poor practice, we offer the chance to mitigate an academic sanction by engaging with a set of online learning resources, designed to coach them and support their learning.

Learning resources

Maintaining the approach of supplementing a comprehensive set of learning resources with individual support, in the year 2021-22, our Academic Liaison Librarian team delivered over 350 information literacy research development sessions to over 10,000 students and saw a further 450 students individually. Sessions on locating and assessing the quality of sources, making the most of e-books and literature searching were embedded into the curricula of all undergraduate courses and the Library team offered a series of webinar training sessions open to all students.

As well as proactively supporting the development of our student’s academic information literacy, we have significantly expanded access to high quality information and data. As part of a recently formed document delivery consortium, our students have access to a large number of library collections across the UK and internationally. Since the introduction of this service in 2020, our collection has expanded, delivering more than 865,000 resources to meet student needs across all subject areas.

Student demand has shaped our Library Service. We have introduced a demand-driven and evidence-based acquisitions service as part of our routine approach to delivering learning resources. Nearly 5,500 e-book titles have been added to our collections across a range of subject areas because of the demand-driven approach. A further 2,000 e-book titles have been added through the evidence-based approach which involves careful analysis of data relating to user interactions with the resource catalogue. Moreover, following the introduction of intelligent demand services, we have automatically upgraded the access licenses of nearly 600 titles across subject areas ensuring uninterrupted coverage for all of the students wishing to use them^{xx}. At the same time the expansion of our library catalogue has been done in a considered way, celebrating the many social and cultural backgrounds of our students. We have piloted a ‘diversity audit’ of learning resource lists, not with the intention of removing classics, but to ensure that students benefit from exposure to the widest possible range of thinking and practice. The learning from the pilot now means that resource lists are audited for cultural sensitivity during the development phase of modules and courses, rather than this being a retrospective exercise.

In 2019, we partnered with John Smith Bookshop to deliver the Chester Aspire Book Scheme so that all undergraduate students had access to e-books essential for their course. Working with our students, in 2021, we built on the success of Aspire by creating a new, centrally funded scheme, Kortext. This provides all of our undergraduate students with the core textbooks that they require for the first year of their course. Investing approximately £180,000 in the scheme, University of Chester Libraries has ensured access to students via the e-book collection, seamlessly integrating

with the wider Library offering. Even after just one year of operation, the impact of Kortext stands out, with over 12,000 study sessions taking place using the e-books provided in 2021-22, equating to around 5,000 hours of study time and approximately 160 pages access per user. Whilst the scheme is aimed primarily at undergraduate students, we can already see its impact across the wider student body; with over 2,750 accounts registered on the e-textbook platform that hosts Kortext, we know that it is being utilised by more than just our first-year students^{xxi}.

It is our sense of community and mutual support between staff and students on their academic journeys that makes us strong and ensures we deliver an excellent student experience and student outcomes. The TEF indicators for 'academic support' in the full-time mode underline the confidence that we have in our approach.

Moreover, when looking at the Student Outcomes measures of continuation and completion, the same split indicators demonstrate that students with the same characteristics also achieve successful outcomes broadly in line with our benchmark. In our view, this is the strongest validation of, not just our commitment, but crucially our success in supporting all students, to make sure that they can benefit from and succeed in higher education.

Learning from our students

We value the partnership of each of our students in enhancing the academic experience for all. However, we also recognise that some students, especially those from backgrounds under-represented in higher education, face additional barriers to their engagement. Our Vice Chancellor is Chair of the Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) consortium which is dedicated to improving equality of access and outcomes across the sector and evidencing what works. Through her leadership, and with the implementation of our Citizen Student Strategy, we have sought to tackle some of those challenges in order that all our students, can access the benefits of higher education and succeed.

Case Study: Race Equality Challenge Group^{xxii}

The University has created the paid role of Student Race Advocate, actively including representatives of our BAME students in the University's decision making and activities. The benefits for our whole community are clear: we have gained new perspectives, improved processes and developed staff knowledge by increasing our understanding of the issues that BAME students face. Together, we celebrate the impact that our Student Race Advocates have had in helping us to start breaking down some of the barriers that stand as obstacles to success. We are also proud of the personal impact that undertaking these roles has and the extent to which they support individuals to build their social capital.

The Student Race Advocates programme is just one example of our commitment to ensure that the voice of BAME students in our community is heard. The evidence shows us that our student voice mechanisms overwhelmingly work for these, and many other, groups of students. In the full-time mode, the split indicators for the student voice measure show that satisfaction expressed by Asian and Black students is materially above our benchmark.

We are proud of the achievements of all our students and our community is enriched by their variety of perspectives and opinions.

we want every student to have the same opportunity, so we involve students in decisions about large capital projects as well as their day-to-day experiences. For example, the development of new premises in Warrington town centre benefits students through the development of cutting edge, industry standard resources. We funded five 'Build a Bridge' student consultants whose role it was to represent the diversity of student opinion to influence the design and development of learning, digital and support spaces in our new buildings

The experience that students have of the University as they engage with their studies has the biggest impact on their ability to succeed. Earlier in this submission, we described how we work with our students as partners in our community of learning to ensure that our [courses are designed and approved](#) with their input. Beyond the initial development of our curriculum, the sustained input of students and their feedback is a vital component of our approach to seek a continual enhancement of their academic experience and outcomes.

Our expectation of student partnership for our academic departments is set out as a high-quality baseline above which our subject teams have the freedom to innovate in ways that are best suited to their contexts. Recently transitioning from Staff-Student Liaison Meetings, we now require all departments to hold Student Voice Meetings, promoting the importance we attach to students voicing their views of the University and helping to further enhance our provision whilst building their social capital. The feedback from these sessions is then further contextualised through module evaluations and several institutional surveys (including the NSS). The strength of our approach is then in the multitude of ways in which academic departments engage their students in these processes.

In our internal surveys, as well as in the National Student Survey, students have told us that they recognise and value the opportunities we provide for them to feedback on their academic experience. We are proud that, overall, our indicator for the student voice measure shows that we excel in this area, but the ways in which we engage our students must constantly evolve. For example, we have not been immune from the sector-wide decline in response rates to module evaluation by students. Therefore, over the past four years, we have looked at the ways that we demonstrate to students the value of the feedback that they give us.

Case Study: Real-time student feedback

Chester Law School took advantage of the University's move to action-focussed quality monitoring by implementing a systematic and consistent approach to receiving and responding to student feedback. Shifting from a one-sided model of feedback to a continuous dialogue system, students' concerns and opinions are gathered in advance of Student Voice meetings in order that the meetings themselves focus on solution-finding, rather than information gathering. Module evaluation is more frequent than before (an approach that has now been promoted across the University) and feedback to students timelier. As the Law School outlined in a reflection of their approach to AdvanceHE, responses to the National Student Survey question on the visibility of the use of student feedback increased by 15ppt in a single year^{xxiv}.

Partnership between staff and students is the essence of our community; but it is founded on a desire to always improve. The Chester Students' Union regularly challenges the University to evolve and enhance the academic experience for all students and the University embraces that challenge by working closely with the Union. An example of this is our joint work to facilitate the

network of student representatives; the Union benefits through a diverse pool of student opinion from which it formulates policies and positions and the University benefits by having a team of student volunteers, working with us to enhance the experience of all. Since the 2017/18 academic year to date, together we have recruited and trained over 1,500 undergraduate representatives.

Raising quality for all

An analysis of our TEF indicators shows that in over 90% of measures where the University has an indicator value, we are broadly in line with or materially above our benchmark. We believe that this is indicative of the excellent teaching and academic experience that the majority of our students benefit from. Yet, we are unwilling to accept anything less than the same level of excellence for all. Above, we have outlined the requirements we have for our subject areas to continuously demonstrate a commitment to enhancing quality through [CME](#). Our robust Education Planning process means that where provision falls below our rigorous requirements – either on academic experience, or in relation to student outcomes – there is support, but also accountability. Through these and other quality management systems, we are addressing the few areas where our split TEF indicators show us to be below our benchmark.

Later, we will explain our approach to supporting students to [progress](#) into highly skilled and managerial employment. We note that 48 of the 57 split indicators for the progression measure are demonstrative of very high-quality outcomes and that, in the last Graduate Outcomes Survey, 83.3% of respondents said that they were engaged in meaningful activity.

Partnerships and apprenticeships

The population of students taught in subcontracted-out partnerships and apprenticeships are small, but the impact of our forward-facing Citizen Student Strategy applies to them equally. To ensure that we can deliver the experience and outcomes for these groups, our strategy in respect of each has been evolving in recent years. In this section, we will briefly outline our approach to delivering for the unique ways in which students in these categories experience the University.

Subcontracted partnerships

Most of the TEF indicators for the student experience measures show that we have successfully worked with our partners to deliver a very high-quality student experience, even as we have been withdrawing from a number of these arrangements. Similarly, the continuation and completion measures are broadly in line with our benchmark.

Our refocussed approach means that we can dedicate more time and resources to our larger subcontracted partners to help them enhance their provision. For example, The Hammond is a nationally renowned specialist performing arts educator in Chester, teaching students from age 11 through to undergraduate level. Since our partnership began, one of the challenges faced by The Hammond has been how to translate their vibrant school environment to higher education. Through our academic partnership monitoring processes, the University has supported the Hammond to structure its approach. An External Examiner report in 2019/20 noted that this support had “enabled changes to take place, creating a much more cohesive degree programme, which has the capability of delivering the high standards expected.” By closely linking staff from the

University's department of Music, Media and Performance, including the delivery of dedicated staff development sessions, we have seen the satisfaction of students at The Hammond with their academic support rise from 76.81% in 2020 to 84.67% in 2022.

The progression measure for students taught in subcontracted-out partnerships is slightly below the benchmark; whilst we are working to support our partners further, we believe that the position is somewhat skewed. Looking at the progression outcomes of our three largest subcontracting partners, an analysis of the Graduate Outcomes survey data shows that the proportion of graduates in highly skilled employment or further study was some way above the regulatory threshold for the Diocese of Chester (79.7%) and The Hammond (68.6%), but below the threshold for the University Centre Reaseheath (39.3%). However, only 13.1% of UCR respondents to the GO survey in 2019-20 reported having completed an honours degree, with the remainder having completed qualifications at a level below this, raising the issue of whether we can reasonably expect the same graduate-level employment from foundation degrees. Moreover, 31% of UCR respondents reported having employment in SOC group 6 in roles such as Zookeeper, Aquarist and Veterinary Care Assistant which, while not currently recognised as graduate level employment, are known nationally to be fields where many employers do require a degree. They also clearly reflect the subject specialism of UCR and likely career aspirations of its graduates.

Apprenticeships

We have carefully managed the growth of our undergraduate apprenticeships to ensure that our offer aligns with local demand. Currently, we have nearly 500 apprentices in learning and we are working with 105 employers to provide vital workforce skills. The University underwent an Ofsted inspection in May 2022 and although we were disappointed with the overall outcome, we believe that we have made significant strides in improving the experience of our apprentice learners since then. We are confident that our students and their employers recognise the value of the University delivering this important training, as was evidenced in the surveys conducted by Ofsted during the inspection.

The population of apprentice students is too small to provide TEF indicators for completion and progression, but our overall and split indicators for continuation are all broadly in line with or materially above our benchmark, apart from those students aged under 21 on entry. However, with an indicator value of 87.5%, this is significantly above the B3 threshold of 70% and only slightly below our indicator for full-time undergraduates (89.6%). Moreover, an analysis of Education Skills Funding Agency data in November 2022 shows that the University's Qualification Pass Rates exceeded the sector average in all but one of the standards for which data was available.

Our apprenticeship students benefit from the same supportive environment as all other students, augmented by support from a dedicated Learner Mentor. The TEF data shows that every one of the five student experience indicators for our apprenticeship population is materially above our benchmark. Moreover, on the split indicators, where data is available, all but three are also materially above our benchmark, demonstrating a consistently outstanding experience for these students.

Student outcomes

Our student outcomes measures for continuation, completion and progression are indicative of our success in providing very high-quality outcomes. Similarly, we are pleased to see that a majority of

split indicators for the continuation and completion measures, once allowing for the distribution of statistical uncertainty, are broadly in line with our benchmark.

On the progression measure, whilst overall the University's outcomes match its benchmark, we recognise, as some of the split indicators show, that there is more we need to do. However, we also contend that our internal data demonstrates that we are supporting students to achieve progression outcomes which are successful in their own contexts.

Positive outcomes

In our submission, we have explained how our supportive environment enables our students to thrive. We believe that there is a clear correlation between the very high-quality and outstanding indicators we can see for our student experience measures and the rates at which our students continue in higher education, successfully complete and achieve very high-quality progression outcomes. To that end, everything that we have already described in this submission contributes to the successful student outcomes we deliver.

Continuation and completion

In the earlier analysis of the [first aim of our Learning & Teaching Strategy](#) we explained that since 2018, we have been moving away from a traditional process of quality assurance. We replaced the sector standard model, which was inward looking and passive, with one that is risk-based, centred on actions to improve the experience of our students and the outcomes they achieve. Through our relaunched Continuous Monitoring of Enhancement process, rather than confining review of provision and outcomes to a single point in the year, our course teams respond to a wealth of information (student feedback, external examiner comments, engagement information, early assessment outcomes etc.) throughout the year and maintain a quality improvement plan. The benefit of this approach is that we don't wait until a fixed point in the year to respond to emerging trends, but rather, we act at the time we identify an issue and make improvements that students can benefit from straight away, rather than deferring them for future cohorts.

Case Study: Using CME to improve outcomes

At the end of the 2018-19 academic year, 81.8% of Social Work students had a successful outcome at Level 4. Using the CME approach, the course team engaged with data in real-time, analysing the barriers to students remaining engaged and taking actions to address these as they occurred, rather than waiting for an annual checkpoint. At the end of 2021-22, the proportion of students who were successful at the end of Level 4 had increased to 93.9%. This approach was further validated when, at the Social Worker of the Year Awards, our team won the University of the Year award^{xxv}. In the narrative accompanying the award, the judges referred to feedback from our students who said that the University was "a place they felt 'respected, heard and understood'". We would argue that these three words embody the spirit and purpose of our Citizen Student Strategy.

Progression

In the section on course content and delivery, we outlined examples of how we embed the development of key employability skills into our courses. The TEF indicators validate the work that we do to help our students progress and overall, they are broadly in line with our benchmark, along with the majority of the split indicators. However, based on what is reported in the Graduate Voice section of the Graduate Outcomes survey, we believe that our true performance is better than the indicators suggest. In each of the three years of the Graduate Outcomes Survey, HESA data shows us that at least 83% of respondents reported that the activity they were engaged in at the

time of the survey was meaningful; in two out of three years, this exceeded the sector average. Moreover, 70% of respondents in each of the years reported that their current activity fitted with their future plans, demonstrating our success in giving our graduates the best possible start to their careers.

Preparing students to make the transition from higher education to rewarding and worthwhile careers is a key aim of all our provision. That is why all our students who are not taking a vocationally based or professional regulated course are required to engage with work-based learning; and at Level 5 this accounts for approximately 43% of their contact time. Over the last ten years, approximately 13,000 students have taken a module called *Enhancing Your Employability through Work Based Learning*. At its core is a 5-week placement which gives students crucial exposure to the professional workplace and in the last three years alone we have worked with over 1,400 employers to deliver this module. We believe that this is critical to the development of our students because, as noted by the 2019 High Fliers report, over a third of the recruiters who took part in research commented that graduates with no previous work experience were unlikely to be successful during the selection process for their graduate programmes^{xxvi}.

The impact of our approach can be seen, in part, through the responses that students give to our Career Readiness Survey. At the start of each academic year, we invite all undergraduates to complete the survey and respond to two simple questions: rating their current thinking about their career plans (uncertain, developing, actioning or sorted) and detailing the activities that they have undertaken in the last 12 months to support their future employability. In the last three years for which data is available (2018/19 – 2020/21), on average 5.1% students who responded as they were commencing Level 5 said that they were at the stage of positively actioning (as opposed to working out) their career development plans. When surveyed again 12 months later, having had the opportunity of a workplace experience, this had increased to on average 15% of the students actioning their plans. In our view, that demonstrates the importance of giving students the first step on the ladder towards achieving their career goals through our Work-Based Learning provision.

Our University-wide module gives all students an opportunity to build their workplace confidence but, in keeping with our overall approach through the Citizen Student Strategy, we ensure that this does not stifle innovation. Aside from our vocational courses, we engage our course teams to identify further ways to support students towards outstanding progression outcomes.

Case Study: Employer engagement in learning

In our Business and Marketing courses, we offer specialist modules in retail management. In this highly competitive arena, our course team works closely with around ten local employers each year to deliver the Chester Business School Retail Management Assessment Centre, an integral part of a Level 6 module. Students present to a panel of employers on a diverse range of topics and benefit not just from academic feedback, but also feedback from their prospective employers. Speaking about this approach to authentic assessment in March 2022, a student who benefitted from their experience of the assessment centre said:

It tested a completely different skill set that I had to adapt to, but I found it useful, and now I feel more confident to apply these skills for future working practices and real-life assessment centres.

Case Study: Developing key transferable skills

Another example of the innovative approach taken by our staff is the development of a Level 6 professional practice module for students in the department of Music, Media and Performance. Acknowledging the highly competitive nature of the creative industries, the module supports students to develop a wide range of transferable skills and to build their confidence in their ability to succeed in all areas of the economy. Using a range of practical skills development sessions along with seminars and guest speakers, the module introduces students to topics such as web-design, social media management and set within a context of equality and diversity. The assessment for the module is a mock job interview and the submission of a portfolio demonstrating students' newly acquired employability skills.

In 2019/20, the External Examiner for BA Music and Popular Music Performance said:

I was impressed by the module design and assessment work produced for PA6004, the Developing Professional Practice module... It is an excellent area in which to encourage critical reflection, and the tools produced by the students assist in the development of profession profiles and careers, enhancing 'employability' but so much more.

However, the greatest reward for this work can be seen in a message to the Module Leader from a member of the 2021 cohort of graduates:

I just wanted to drop you an email to say that I got a job yesterday, in a field that is really exciting and new for me. And I felt I needed to thank you personally for the things that you taught me in the module that I used in my interview that landed me the job. (2021, graduate from the Department of Media, Music and Performance)

Educational gains

Whilst we strongly believe in the value of higher education for social good as an end in itself, we also know that our graduates will have the greatest impact on their communities if they are engaged in meaningful work that meets their expectations and uses the knowledge and skills that they develop during their studies. With almost a third of our students represented in IMD quintiles 1 and 2, we believe that educational gains are best illustrated by the careers that our graduates secure, In this sense, our approach is aligned closely to progression outcomes.

Supporting educational gain

Enabling our students to achieve the educational gains we intend requires a two-pronged approach. Firstly, as set out in the Citizen Student Strategy we must develop our students' social capital. Secondly, to ensure that students have the right opportunities to reach their true potential, we work with employers to support local and regional productivity growth. By doing both things, we produce confident and highly skilled graduates who have access to high quality and rewarding careers in the regional economy.

Based on the work of Tomlinson (2017) and Catts & Ozga (2005), our definition of social capital has been developed with educational gains firmly in mind:

As a fundamental principle of the Citizen Student Strategy, the University of Chester makes opportunities available to every student and graduate to help build their social capital. These opportunities are available at every stage of the student

*journey to help students and graduates **develop networks and relationships**, **develop confidence** and other purposeful **skills**, learn about other **cultures** and **challenges** within society, link **academic learning to the real world** and progress to **successful futures**.*

Developing networks and relationships

To support development of a buoyant graduate jobs market in our region, we work with employers, for example through the Workplace Experiences scheme^{vii} and through our knowledge exchange activity. This is crucial to achieving our intended education gains because, in our latest Career Readiness Survey, over 85% of respondents told us that they wanted to stay in the local area once they had graduated^{xxvii}. The OfS geography of employment shows that many of our local areas are in quintiles 1 and 2; emphasising the importance of our support for the regional economy if our graduates are to have the opportunity of the careers they want, in the location they want.

Developing confidence and other purposeful skills

Throughout this submission, we have described the strong emphasis that we place on embedding approaches to employability and other transferable skills within the curriculum. Examples can be found from our work on [curriculum development](#), [personalised academic support](#), the [learning resources](#) we invest in and in our approach to ensuring [work-based experiential learning](#) for all students at Level 5.

Beyond the curriculum, our Careers and Employability service provides a range of initiatives through which students have opportunities to further develop their social capital in ways that are meaningful and demonstrable. A key element of this is the Chester Difference Award (CDA) which provides a framework for students to organise their work experience, volunteering and extra curricula activity into a portfolio covering themes such as communication, creative thinking, leadership, enterprise and carbon literacy. By completing the CDA portfolio, students develop a record of their activity and skills which they can easily present to prospective employers.

In additio

We are a proud beneficiary of the

Santander Network Fund which is designed to widen access to networking opportunities for these students. Eligible students can apply for an award of either £250 or £500 to support activity such as membership of professional associations or societies, membership of networking groups, attendance at conferences or exhibitions or subscriptions to sector publications.

Learning about cultures and challenges within society

Our approach to [student partnership](#) is itself a strong element of how we encourage students to have a voice and build their social capital. Within this, the exchange of ideas and learning about how different individuals experience the University enriches all who participate. We have recently strengthened this approach by setting up the Social Capital Operations Group. The purpose of the group is to ensure that we don't just talk about developing the social capital of our students, but that it becomes a lived reality, visible and accessible to all members of our community.

Evaluation

We are presently trialling an approach to evaluating the gains made by our students by tracking cohorts; analysing their starting points (primarily through demographic characteristics) and, annually, measuring their engagement with social capital building activity and their career readiness confidence. We will then review outcomes for each cohort through the GO survey paying

An initial review of the data available to us suggests that our activity is achieving the intended outcome. The TEF indicators outline that overall, the University performs broadly in line with its benchmark for progression outcomes. This holds true also for graduates who were reported in IMD quintiles 1 and 2 and, particularly pleasingly, also for those graduates reported in the OfS geography of employment quintile 1. The GO survey for 2019/20 shows that 83% of respondents said that the activity they were engaged in was meaningful to them. Tracking the same cohort back to the NSS, nearly 90% of respondents agreed with the statement “My course has provided me with skills I can use in my employment”. Therefore, as we develop our approach to evaluating the success of our educational gain strategy, we are confident in our position.

The University of Chester is a community of students and staff where every day we live out our mission to serve others. We understand the power that education has to transform lives and we accept our duty to continuously improve our practice so that we keep delivering the very high quality and outstanding academic experience and student outcomes that we have outlined in this submission.

In the first few weeks of September 2022, we asked our students “how’s it going?”. 1537 students responded and 63% were undergraduates, drawn from every Faculty and academic department. Almost 94% of respondents said their academic experience was positive. We asked them to tell us what is great about being at the University of Chester and this is what they said:



i 'Our Mission, Vision and Values'. Available at <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/about-university/our-mission-vision-and-values>.

ii 'Citizen Student Strategy' published 2021. Available at <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/citizen-student-strategy>.

iii 'Analysis of Digital Insights Survey December 2021', 5 July 2022, Appendix E. Unpublished. Education Committee papers (13 July 2022) [doc ref. 001]

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- iv 'Learning and Teaching Strategy 2017-2022' published 2017. Available at <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/learning-and-teaching-institute/learning-and-teaching-strategy>.
- v 'HESA Table 10: Teaching Qualification Marker and Academic Year' published February 2022. Available at <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/staff/table-10>.
- vi 'THE Leadership and Management Awards 2018 shortlist' published 12 July 2018. Available at <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/times-higher-education-leadership-management-awards-2018-shortlist-announced>.
- vii 'Workplace Experiences'. Available at <https://www1.chester.ac.uk/careers-and-employability/employers-voluntary-organisations-and-recruiters/workplace-experiences-0>.
- viii 'Purpose Universities Coalition – End of Year Report 2022'. Publication pending. TEF Steering Group data repository [doc ref. 006]
- ix 'Enhanced Field Work Learning, University of Chester' published 2018. Available at <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/cate-team/enhancing-fieldwork-learning-university-chester>.
- x 'Whatuni Student Choice Awards 2021' published 21 June 2021. Available at <https://www.whatuni.com/advice/news/student-choice-awards-winners-2021/104552/>.
- xi 'Biological Sciences External Examiner Report', 8 June 2021. Unpublished. TEF Steering Group data repository [doc ref. 005]
- xii 'By any other name? The impacts of differing assumptions, expectations, and misconceptions in bringing about resistance to student-staff partnership' published 7 May 2019. Available at <https://mulpress.mcmaster.ca/ijsap/article/view/3550>.
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