

Introduction

Excellent student experience and outcomes do not happen by chance: they are the result of a sustained pursuit of continuous quality improvement. This submission provides evidence that education at the University of Southampton is outstanding. We will show how our strategic focus on teaching, the learning environment, and our support and resources enable and empower our students to have a truly transformative learning experience and achieve the excellent outcomes evident in the OfS metrics. We will also demonstrate how this success is rooted in systematic, evidence-based actions taken across our University and in partnership with our students.

Section 1: Context

1.1 The University of Southampton is currently celebrating its 70th year. We are proud of our global impact and reach, sense of place, connections with the cities in which we are based, and the positive effect this has on the experiences of all our students. We are both research and knowledge exchange and enterprise (KEE) intensive in our activity and focus, and have a strong reputation both in the UK and internationally, being ranked 13th in the Complete University Guide, and consistently in the top 100 institutions in the QS World Rankings. Beyond our outstanding performance in both the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF), a recent [Economic Impact Report](#) into our economic and social impact during the 2020/21 academic year showed we generated £4.14bn of economic impact across the UK, with approximately £1.6bn of that impact in our local area. We are proud that our learning environment and commitment to excellence across research, KEE and education realise positive outcomes for students.

Our 15,000 undergraduate students make up 60% of our total student community, who study across the cities of Southampton and Winchester on our main campus, or one of our specialist campuses, such as our state-of-the-art innovation campus, our waterfront campus, and our art and design school. We also have a small campus in Malaysia¹. Our student community is diverse: approximately 20% of our undergraduates are international, and more than half of our entrants are from a BAME background, from IMD Q1 or POLAR4 Q1, mature, disabled, or a care leaver. 99% are studying full time; we recruit to just two part-time undergraduate programmes. All other part-time students have moved from full-time study as part of a bespoke study package designed to give them the best possible opportunity to continue and succeed.

Our 300+ undergraduate programmes stretch and motivate every student to reach their full potential through engaging with industry-relevant, cutting-edge knowledge, research, innovation, and enterprise. More than one in four of our undergraduate entrants enrol on programmes that include a postgraduate component. Our proportion of activity of this type is one of the highest in the UK. In the 2021/22 academic year, a further 1,760 students extended their studies through a year in placement or through a language year abroad; in 2022/23, this rose to 2,067. When combined with our diverse and inclusive co-curricular offer and excellent learning resources, this rich learning environment provides opportunities for our undergraduates to create and discover new knowledge and insights and take these understandings into the next stages of their lives.

1.2. We are committed to applying our insights and inventiveness to solve the most complex and immediate societal and environmental challenges. Our education, research and KEE are distinctively intertwined, allowing us to achieve the greatest impact. What and how we teach is informed by our **Triple Helix**. This strengthening of connections between education, research and

¹ These 428 students are predominantly in the early years of their programmes or complete their programme in the UK and are therefore not included in this submission

KEE, and putting people at the heart of our thinking, creates an exceptional student experience and excellent outcomes. Combined with our behaviours and values, which revolve around equity, global impact, and social responsibility, this results in a recognisable and distinctive University of Southampton graduate.



1.3. Our Strategy encapsulates our ambitions and directs our work. It commits us to enabling all students to develop their full potential and to ensuring our graduates are recognised globally as curious, engaged, articulate, ethical, culturally aware, enterprising, and socially and environmentally responsible. Central to this ambition, and illustrated throughout this submission, is our commitment to equipping students with the skills and mindset to flourish in the world of the future, and preparing them for jobs and challenges that will keep evolving; ensuring all students have the opportunity to succeed irrespective of background and socio-economic context; sustaining meaningful engagement through collaboration and partnerships with our learners; and providing exemplary support for all of our students during their education journey.

1.4. Our exceptional performance in this assessment period reflects our sustained pursuit of excellence and data-led approach to targeting innovation and interventions, motivated by our Silver Award in 2018. All of our OfS indicators are flagged as Outstanding or Very High Quality, and our split-level data shows that we are providing an exceptional education for all of our learners across all domains of experience and outcomes. We are proud of our reputation for education and how our focused and sustained work has led to significant improvement over recent years.

We recognise areas where we could do even better. Our Strategic Major Projects (SMP) approach ensures we focus resource, innovation, and sustained effort on key areas of experience and outcomes identified by our students, adopting evidence-based and co-created improvement plans. Since the last TEF submission, SMPs have focused on improving our students' experience of assessment and feedback; learning resources and academic support; programme journeys; and creating student-focused, friction-free support services. In section 2 we describe how these strategic projects, co-developed with our students, have made real differences. We have also focused on further improving outcomes for our students and in doing so have strengthened our Very High Quality completion and progression indicators. We have introduced a range of innovations across our student careers, employability and enterprise activity informed by both our use of Career Registration data and our student feedback. These are described in sections 3 and 4. We are pleased that these enhancements are already having an impact with significant improvement in both completion (+1.1 percentage points) and progression (+4.1 percentage points), with completion rates moving to above benchmark in year 4. Building on this initial success, a holistic *Successful Futures* SMP has recently been launched to continue to ensure our students have the best possible outcomes from their time with us.

1.5. SUSU, our Students' Union, are partners in all our work. They are co-designers of our student-facing services, providers of much of our co-curricular offer and resources, custodians of our extensive student rep system and a source of both challenge and support as we make key decisions about our University. The impact of this successful partnership is evidenced in a wide range of co-created improvements and innovations described throughout this submission. We have involved our SUSU President and Vice-President for Education in every stage of developing this submission. SUSU has also made a separate submission, sharing its own perspective on the student experience and outcomes at our University.

Section 2: Student Experience

2.1. We are proud of the excellent experience we consistently provide for our students. Our institutional-level NSS data show Very High Quality scores above our benchmarks across all domains and all groups of students – something we have worked hard to achieve in recent years. We are equally proud that this excellent experience is across all areas of importance to our students and, vitally, student feedback tells us that we maintained this during one of the most disruptive periods in recent history.

Our upward trajectory in student experience measures reflects the impact of our targeted improvement activities. For example, the success of an SMP focused on improving academic support is reflected in an improvement from -1.4 ppts below benchmark in year 1 to +2.1 ppts above benchmark in Year 4.

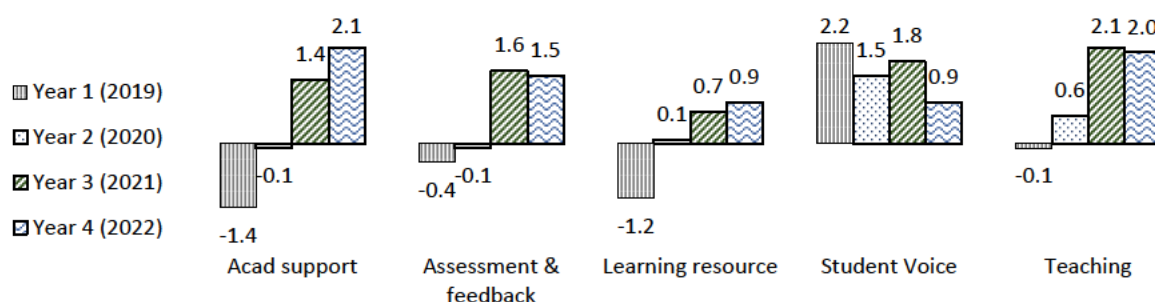


Figure 1: Student Experience: Difference to benchmark

The global pandemic required a rapid and innovative response to ensure we maintained our excellent teaching, learning and student experience. Despite the sector-wide negative impact on experience scores in 2021 compared to 2020, the data shows that our response was better than most in the sector in mitigating the impact of the pandemic on our student body. Our HE sector ranking in all TEF NSS sections improved in 2021, and our difference to benchmark improved in all five indicators between Year 2 and Year 3. In response to student feedback, we have retained many of our student-centred innovations introduced during the pandemic period as 'covid keeps', as described in section 2.7.2.

Our inclusive and targeted approach ensures all students have an excellent experience and is also evidenced in our data where we are above benchmark for most of our student demographic splits. Our commitment to tailoring our support and resources to our diverse student community, and our flagship *Ignite* Widening Participation programme, are central to this excellence and are described in later sections.

Despite excellent institutional-level data, our students tell us that their experience is variable across individual programmes. We have therefore added annual NSS Action Plans based on interrogation of our data at subject level, and a funded NSS 'quick wins' initiative to our existing quality enhancement activities. These help us to target specific improvement interventions in those programmes where we do not meet students' expectations so that we can ensure all students have the experience we endeavour to deliver. Examples of improvements following targeted intervention at subject level are described in sections 2.2.2 and 2.4.2.

2.2: Outstanding teaching, feedback, and assessment practices

2.2.1. Our Triple Helix approach results in an institution-wide commitment to excellence in both education provision and the experience and outcomes for our students. Our students consistently rate the quality of their teaching highly, and this is seen in our NSS data across all years and non-subject splits. Twelve of our subject areas are 'Outstanding' for the Teaching indicator. Our improving trajectory is reflected in our scores relative to benchmark where we have moved from -0.1 below benchmark in Year 1 to +2.0 above benchmark in Year 4. Our external examiners and Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) assessor reports also reflect this excellence.

Through our student-centred approach to education design and continuous improvement, evidenced in section 2.8, we provide an outstanding education for all our students. This is achieved via our stretching and inspiring curricula described in section 2.3, and through our holistic approach to an excellent student experience described throughout this section.

2.2.2. We regularly examine and act on feedback at School, programme, and module level. Our NSS data, combined with the data from our annual Southampton Student Experience Survey (SSS), and feedback shared by student reps, focus groups and student co-design panels, enables us to take a holistic view of how we can provide outstanding education and a strategic, evidence-based approach to innovation and improvement. Three institution-wide SMPs focused on excellence in teaching and assessment were initiated over the assessment period, which have had significant and wide-ranging impact. While each project was affected by the challenges of the global pandemic, the focus on co-design has meant positive outcomes for our learners.

Through our *Reducing Curriculum Complexity* project, we are enabling students to make better-informed choices within their programme and ensuring a more resilient delivery of the options we offer by introducing well-curated pathways within programmes and removing unnecessary complications. Despite the pandemic, we improved our position against benchmarks for relevant NSS questions: 'Overall satisfaction' (+0.2 to +2.8); 'The course is well organised and running smoothly' (+2.5 to +3.8, flagged as significant in Years 2-4); 'The timetable works efficiently for me' (+1.2 to +3.3, flagged as significant in Year 4); and 'learning opportunities' (-0.6 to +0.7).

Our *Enhancing Academic Support and Delivery* project produced a range of outcomes, including a Common Framework for Online Education which was initially developed to guide the rapid move to remote/online teaching and learning during the pandemic. Implementation was supported by practical resources, workshops, and a 'Team of 25' – School-based education champions supporting the application of the Framework within discipline contexts.

"I would like to commend the programme and module leaders on designing a degree programme which holds many practical and real-world applications. These learning activities are highly relevant in the environmental/oceanographic workplace and are providing the students with an extensive set of skills to take forward into their future careers."
Oceanography External Examiner
(2020-21)

"The whole programme has been carefully structured to provide you with an appropriate learning curve, with complexity building throughout the years."

"The course allows you to tailor your degree to the aspects you like the best." (NSS 2022)

"The Framework ensures continual delivery of teaching and learning to students without compromising quality, access, and standards [...] This has been achieved through consultation with staff and students via pulse surveys, as well as regular meetings of the Team of 25 who represent all Schools."

[KPMG Blended Learning Audit, 2021](#)

Our students appreciated our student-centred pandemic response, including our excellent online provision; this was reflected in both our 2021 NSS outcomes described in 2.1 and our internal surveys. This Common Framework has now matured into a resource for supporting excellent online elements of our programmes and the best use of digital learning spaces post-pandemic, which is further described in section 2.7. Our digital provision has been externally recognised at national level as excellent practice in the OfS Digital Learning and Teaching Review 2021, by Times Higher Education and in a review by KPMG – our internal auditors.

Our *Improving Assessment and Feedback* SMP recognises that student experience in this domain remains below our aspirations. We understand that having curricula and assessments that are designed to stretch and challenge means we need to work hard to ensure our students are well-supported to achieve the excellent degree outcomes described later in section 3. This project has a focus on evidence-based and discipline-specific enhancements and innovations through upskilling and supporting academic teams, improving the quality and utility of feedback, and reducing attainment gaps. The quality and importance of this work were recognised through OfS Catalyst B funding for a multi-institution action research project. The final report on this project reveals almost half of our interventions led to improved learning outcomes and a third led to improved attainment for students from lower socioeconomic groups. We also saw the eradication of the BAME awarding gap in Law, and Ocean and Earth Science. The community of practice established as part of this SMP (Researching Assessment Practice Group) received an Advance HE Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence (CATE).

Examples of improvements in assessment, leading to real impact, include Philosophy, where a draft submission and rapid feedback platform has been established for essay assessments; Graphic Arts, where there has been a focus on developing students' understanding of 'good' when documenting the creative process and critical review of the work of peers; and Archaeology, where there has been a focus on grading criteria. In all three of these disciplines, 2022 NSS data shows increased scores in the Assessment and Feedback domains (+4.5, +21.2 and +11.5 respectively).

"I was particularly impressed this year by the assessment tasks on the language modules which have had to be comprehensively re-thought and re-designed to function as online or take-home assessments. The teaching team have clearly taken a significant amount of time to fundamentally re-think what they do in order to make online/take-home assessments work. Given that this is a tricky issue for languages across the sector, I would recommend that this could be shared as best practice."
Modern Languages External Examiner (2020-21)

"Researching Assessment Practices (RAP) is a vibrant, creative, and supportive assessment and feedback community of practice. The RAP team are passionate about enhancing assessment practices through the use of a research-informed, inclusive, and integrated self-regulatory assessment framework, working with students as partners to support staff and student agency in assessment."
CATE award feedback, 2018

2.3: Course content and delivery that inspires and stretches students

2.3.1. Our University is both research and KEE intensive. We are locally engaged and globally connected. We have an impressive range of resources, both in terms of facilities and people that are described in section 2.4, and we are fully committed to co-creation with our students described in section 2.8. This richness means we provide an inspirational and engaging education that challenges and stretches students, allows them to learn about what inspires them, exposes them to, and engages them in, real-world problems and authentic experiences, and is delivered through programmes and modules based on cutting-edge knowledge, research, innovation, and enterprise.

This is reflected in our consistently high score in the NSS question 'The course is intellectually stimulating' (87-88% over the assessment period), increasing from 1.1 ppts to 4.1 ppts above benchmark and flagged as statistically significant in Years 3 and 4. Our programmes are developed and delivered by colleagues who are research active, who regularly engage with employers and practitioners, and who bring a range of expertise to their teaching. Our curricula offer depth, breadth, choice, application of learning, and challenges to ensure students on all programmes experience a transformational learning experience that leads to outstanding outcomes.

"I was very impressed by the lengths that were gone to to ensure that students gained as much field based and practical experience as possible under the circumstances...These exemplify an outstanding level of commitment to the students' learning experiences."

Marine Biology External Examiner (2020-21)

2.3.2 Signatures of our unique, inspiring, and stretching education experience include:

- **The Triple Helix in action in our education.** Teaching and learning about, and engaging in, knowledge exchange, enterprise and innovation is an integral and growing part of all of our education programmes and co-curricular offer. The extensive activity and opportunities on offer are further described in sections 3 and 4. We benefit from educators who are engaged in industry and practice, and who bring to life the richness of the area of study and how to apply learning to real-world challenges. This extends beyond involvement in professional programmes: for example, the support of teaching, learning and research projects by those in the creative industries in our art and design programmes, through participation in the Royal Society's Entrepreneur in Residence scheme and by the use of RAEng Visiting Professors in engineering programmes.

"Visitors thought the Triple Helix approach was an ambitious plan and noted how this approach was embedded not just at University level but at programme level as well. This approach combines education, research, knowledge exchange and enterprise to develop collaborative partnerships to enhance the teaching and learning experience." PSRB report, Health and Care Professions Council, 2022

- **Researcher-led and research-enriched teaching.** Our education is designed and delivered by leading, internationally excellent researchers and offers undergraduates the opportunity to create new knowledge themselves by conducting their own research. The impacts of this research-led, research-informed, and research-rich education experience are described in section 2.4.

"Some really fantastic project work carried out by students and supervisors in the School, there is a clear opportunity to contribute to original research."

Physics and Astronomy External Examiner (2020-21)

- **Access to world-class facilities.** From our anechoic and reverberant chambers to our wind tunnel; from a world-class concert hall to our Digital Humanities Hub; and from our research vessel R.V. *Callista* and 138-metre towing tank to world-leading photonics and optoelectronic research facilities, our students have access to an incredible range of cutting-edge resources and experts to support their learning and to spark their curiosity. Undergraduates share research and innovation spaces with postgraduate students and staff, igniting collaborative projects, further learning opportunities and inspirational career thinking.
- **Experience-led education.** Experience is vital for engagement, enrichment, and employability. We incorporate field trips, off-site and industry visits, placements, and time spent abroad into

our courses. Although modulated by the pandemic, this remains a key feature of our provision and is further described in section 4.

- **Embedded further study, enrichment, and stretch.** More than one in four undergraduates undertake a programme incorporating m-level study, a year in industry or a year abroad. This provides built-in application, stretch, or progression. We have seen interest in our engaging and stretching integrated master's programmes grow, with the proportion of entrants increasing from 17.6% in 2010 to 28.2% in 2020. The exceptional outcomes of students completing these programmes are detailed in section 3.3.
- **Going beyond core, to a rich range of well-curated options and electives.** Our flexible offer allows for student-led tailoring of degrees along well-curated pathways, and a broad range of electives and choices, including minors in many programmes and the opportunity to study one or more of our innovative interdisciplinary modules.
- **Sustainability education.** Our institutional commitment to sustainability extends to our education and our students. Our education innovations in this domain include the mapping of the Sustainable Development Goals learning in all modules; an engaging, student co-designed online module at the beginning of study for all students; an interdisciplinary elective sustainability module; an option to study a sustainability minor; the appointment of student sustainability champions working with staff to identify learning opportunities; and ongoing work to embed sustainability more extensively in all curricula and learning opportunities.

"I am impressed by a wide range of essay topics that students were given in some of the modules. I think this offers students with an opportunity to choose to be assessed in the area where they feel most confident. I think such a flexibility would promote students' engagement whereby students can take learning to their advantage."

English Language External Examiner
(2020-21)

2.4: Research, innovation, scholarship, and professional and employer engagement contribute to an outstanding experience

2.4.1. Our research excellence and intensity mean we are well placed to provide a research-led and research-enriched education. There is a wide range of opportunities to engage in research and with researchers across all programmes. Our students learn in departments where 92% of the research outputs, and 97% of the research environments, are judged as internationally excellent or world-leading (REF 2021).

This research richness and excellence across all disciplines are reflected in our programmes of study. All undergraduates study on programmes that include a research dissertation or project, and explicit research methods modules or teaching. Our students have access to cutting-edge research facilities, as described above, and to staff researching in both their disciplinary fields and across disciplinary boundaries, bringing rich and novel opportunities to their studies. For example, the

RESearch Modules (RESM) give students studying in one of the Social Sciences disciplines access to both research methods learnings and project opportunities across the wide variety of research approaches employed by our Social Sciences researchers. We also offer a significant number of student research internships in the summer, including a voluntary research assistant

"The teaching overall has been fantastic and the amount of clinical specialists/researchers who have been brought in to facilitate our learning has been really good."
NSS feedback, NSS 2022)

"The emphasis on research as a core tool within the designers' skill set is fundamental and admirable. It forms such a key role in employability, and I delighted to see it remains a key factor in WSA's curriculum."

Fashion and Textile Design External Examiner (2020-21)

scheme for Psychology undergraduates and our programme of University of Southampton Internal Internships. For example, in the academic year 2019/20 we ran over 30 research-based internships internally, where students led research projects focused on key institutional priorities including developing and delivering our education and student experience SMPs. Together, these curricular and co-curricular experiences enable our students to apply research thinking to problems, generate new knowledge themselves, and meaningfully consider further study and research careers.

2.4.2. Our excellence in KEE provides a unique learning experience that includes both teaching and project supervision from a diverse range of academics, and industry and enterprise professionals. Our University was one of only two English universities that met or exceeded the median for its cluster against all seven knowledge exchange perspectives in the first two KEF exercises, and innovation and entrepreneurship are built into both our programmes and our co-curricular offer. Curriculum examples include the Social Impact Lab interdisciplinary module focused on social enterprise and knowledge exchange, and the Entrepreneurial Management module available to our Business School students, which supports students with mentors, entrepreneurs in residence, access to industry experts, and its own 'Dragon's Den' competition with business seed funding by the School. Our co-curricular excellence in this space, including the support and facilities to meaningfully engage students in knowledge exchange and social enterprise, as well as support for student startups and student entrepreneurs, is described in section 4. This enrichment of our education supports our students to develop the capabilities and ways of thinking to successfully contribute to the innovation economy. We have nurtured extensive links with industry, employers, local enterprise and start-up communities, charities and our local health service which connect us to a diverse range of professionals who support us in designing and delivering relevant, contemporary, and inspiring education programmes. Many industry links are related to our location – the port, the creative industries, and the local engineering industry – while others result from our reputation and expertise across a range of disciplinary fields.

Our KEE career pathway also enables us to attract and retain staff outside of the conventional academic pathway who enrich our programmes. For example, Music at Southampton, which has Outstanding flags in all student experience and outcomes measures, has a curriculum that offers students engaging routes through their programmes (such as Music Technology or Composing), while simultaneously ensuring that graduates have the skills valued by employers within – and beyond – the music and wider creative industries. Nearly all Music staff have worked in the creative industries before becoming academics, and many continue to be engaged outside of the University as composers, managers, performers, and consultants.

We have 39 PSRB recognitions across 120 undergraduate programmes reflecting both the rigour and reputation of our programmes and our commitment to employability. We also have over 300 students each year completing programmes that include either a year in placement or a substantial industry placement with employers including, for example, Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Warner Bros, and Southern Health NHS Trust. Other important industry and employer inputs include programme co-design (for example, Expert by Experience patient panels in Medicine and Health Sciences); co-teaching (for example, in our Environmental Sciences programme where the Sustainability Professional module is co-delivered by alumni who work in the sustainability field); and co-supervision (our Engineering and Environmental Science final-year projects focus on industry challenges). This professional body, employer and local economy engagement supports our students in building career thinking into their time with us and prepares them well for successful futures.

2.5: Outstanding support for staff development and excellent academic practice

2.5.1. People are at the core of our Triple Helix approach and institutional strategy. This includes parity of esteem for research, KEE and education-focused staff. Our commitment to people and education is evident in how we support and reward academic staff in designing and delivering excellent education. The Centre for Higher Education Practice (CHEP), established in 2017, provides and signposts a range of opportunities for academic professional development across our activity, creating a single unit to support our staff to promote and embed excellent, evidence-informed, and integrated academic practice. We have invested over £1.5m in CHEP during the assessment period. Professional development opportunities are offered in multiple formats to meet the needs of both individuals and teams, and to support innovations arising from our SMP activity. This integrated academic practice support team ensures research and KEE are truly embedded in our education, and that our professional development constantly reinforces collaborative practices. The CHEP team also work in lockstep with our Digital Education Team. This close partnership, accelerated by the pandemic, has become central to ensuring our education offering is outstanding, whatever the mode of delivery or blend of activity. The award-winning Common Framework for Online Education, described in section 2.2.2 is a testament to this effective collaboration in enabling our educators to excel.

Nurturing interest, talent, and excellent academic practice, wherever it is found, is central to our ambition to embed outstanding education design and provision in all our disciplines. CHEP regularly works with interns and SUSU, provides internal secondments, and sponsors education research and innovation projects across our departments. The 'Team of 25', described in section 2.2.2, and the student interns described in section 2.4.1, are examples of the impact of involving our whole community in pedagogical innovation.

2.5.2. We have a strong track record of supporting educators at every stage of their careers and celebrating, recognising, and rewarding our staff with exceptional educational expertise. Our Advance HE-accredited PGCert in Academic Practice has been in place for 20 years and is a probationary requirement for academic staff who teach, offering them protected time to certify and gain official recognition for their growing expertise as they develop as educators. Our state-of-the-art Library research facilities support academics in using research and evidence in their teaching practice. Teaching staff have access to comprehensive training workshops and expert advice on finding, managing, and evaluating information, open-access publishing, research data management, bibliometrics, copyright and intellectual property.

2.5.3. We recognise educational excellence by supporting the award of Advance HE Fellowships. As one of the first institutions to develop a portfolio route to Fellowships, we are one of only 33 HEIs with an accredited route through to Principal Fellow status, and we are proud of our colleagues who continue their recognition journey to the highest level. We have 20 current Principal Fellows. To ensure we support our more junior staff and doctoral students in developing their academic practice and to regain momentum following the impact of the pandemic on our education community, CHEP has been allocated extra funds going forward to provide additional workshops and mentoring to support those individuals aiming for Associate Fellow status and to put on additional assessment boards to meet all levels of fellowship application demands.

We also recognise and celebrate educational excellence through our well-established, education-focused career pathway. As one of the first institutions to have an education-focused pathway, we have been sector-leading in shaping this route to promotion. We support staff on this pathway by taking deliberate steps to identify and address the barriers and enablers for career progression, and adopting sophisticated and broad promotion criteria that acknowledge the diverse

ways in which staff can demonstrate scholarship of learning and teaching. This is evidenced by the increasing proportion of staff at the most senior levels on this pathway, including over 20 who have been promoted to Professorial level (Level 7). This pathway reflects our ambition to attract and retain those who excel in education and pedagogy, and use their educational expertise to influence the curriculum, provide education leadership and drive strategy. Since 2014/15, we have promoted 64 people from Level 4 to Level 5, 82 from Level 5 to Level 6, and four from Level 6 to Level 7 via the education pathway.

2.5.4. Our educators are among some of the very best in the country. Six of our staff have achieved National Teaching Fellow (NTF) status in the last five years, and two teams have received prestigious CATE Awards. All of our NTFs are supported to play a central role in providing case study examples, spreading good practice, and leading education enhancements across the institution, as well as nationally.

We also celebrate educational excellence through our annual Vice-Chancellor's Awards, Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Awards, and our Students' Union-led Education Awards. The VLE Awards have been in place for 10 years, and many of our VLE Award winners acted as departmental champions during our rapid move to online learning during the peak of the pandemic. These VLE Awards were recognised by an international Blackboard Catalyst Award in 2020, as an effective way of improving the educational experience for all learners and sharing these insights with the broader community.

2.6: A supportive learning environment where students have access to outstanding academic support tailored to their needs

2.6.1. In our NSS Learning Community measures, we have seen the difference to benchmark improve from -1.8 pts in 2019 to +2.2 pts in 2022. This outstanding rating and improvement reflects our comprehensive academic support structures and our welcoming and inclusive learning environment. A complete review and redesign of services over the assessment period, alongside our SMP focused on *Enhancing Academic Support and Delivery*, and major strategic investment have led to a step-change in the quality of our provision. In 2020 we created a new Student Engagement team, which leads our work in co-design and engagement, and a Student Communications team dedicated to providing focused, student-centred communication of key University matters, and maintaining a dialogue about our University, education, and support offerings. We are now able to involve students more extensively in co-designing support to ensure we get the 'what, 'when' and 'how' right, and create a seamless and complementary supportive environment with SUSU.

2.6.2. **Providing tailored support.** We dedicate significant resources (£21.3m in the year 2021/22) to provide exceptional academic and pastoral support structures for our students. We recognise that well-supported students reach their full potential, thrive, and go on to have successful futures, especially with that support tailored to their individual needs and accessible throughout their University journey. For non-traditional students, and those with protected characteristics, this extensive and timely support is further enhanced to ensure that any additional or personalised learning support is in place ahead of beginning their studies and is regularly reviewed and amended as needed throughout their learning journey. For example, disabled students have a personalised learning plan, co-designed with them before arrival. Care-experienced students receive direct one-to-one mentorship and a bespoke transitions package. We also host a range of support networks for students including parents, carers and those who face barriers to a traditional mode of learning and engaging with Higher Education. Our

commitment to supporting all students based on their particular needs is reflected in our excellent split level outcomes data described in section 3.

2.6.3. Supporting students pre-entry. We support our students before they arrive so that they have a smooth transition into our community. Developed as part of the *Enhancing Academic Support and Delivery* SMP, we carefully coordinate a comprehensive welcome and induction programme co-designed by academic teams, Professional and Support Services and SUSU. This programme ensures our students are ready to learn, know where and how to find support, have opportunities to build initial peer support networks, and can navigate the University landscape, both physical and virtual.

2.6.4. Providing timely, high-quality academic support. Alongside our Personal Academic Tutors (PATs), whose skills and resources have been enhanced as part of our *Enhancing Academic Support and Delivery* SMP, we offer an extensive range of support through our Academic Skills Hub, which provides advice and guidance for students in a variety of study skills areas, including time management, writing skills, critical thinking, exam preparation, presentation skills, notetaking, and academic integrity. The Hub team also supports students with vital aspects of academic writing such as critical analysis, structure, assignment types and genres, planning, writing styles and understanding feedback. They also assist with mathematical and statistical skills including understanding key concepts, overcoming maths anxiety, application of theory, exam preparation, gathering data, relevant statistical analysis and software support including SPSS and Excel. The service is open-access, available every day of the academic year, and sees over 1,600 students per year, with students able to book initial 20-minute drop-in appointments on the same day. This centrally coordinated service complements the specific subject-level support offered. For example, the School of Maths Student Centre also has a dedicated space for students to work with peers, meet with staff in timetabled slots or work with postgraduate students who offer help.

2.6.5. Building a community to help students thrive. We are proud of our community and recognise the importance of a sense of belonging in ensuring students are engaged in university life. Throughout the assessment period, we have significantly invested in resources that help build community. We work closely with SUSU, who offer over 300 clubs and societies, and we ensure Wednesday afternoons are kept free in timetables so that all students have dedicated time to participate in these activities. Furthermore, our Race Equality Charter Bronze Award, Disability Confident status and recent University Mental Health Charter application reflect our commitment to an inclusive, equitable and equal community.

2.6.6. Ensuring timely and proactive wellbeing support. We make finding solutions and support as easy as possible for our students and are proactive in our approach to wellbeing. The Student Hub is the dedicated first point of contact for all questions and concerns on topics including fees and financial support, accommodation, wellbeing, disability, careers, and course administration. The Hub operates in person and digitally 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 365 days a year. This service is supplemented by a 24/7/365 Wellbeing team which provides timely, focused support (described further in 3.3.3). We also recognise the value of building consistent and trusting relationships between staff and students when offering support. Our work in this area goes beyond our highly skilled professional support staff; in 2021 alone, 1,601 colleagues completed welfare, mental health or safeguarding training, or training to become Mental Health First Aiders, representing 26% of the entire staff cohort in one year.

2.7: Physical and virtual learning resources support outstanding teaching and learning

2.7.1. Over the last five years, we have invested significantly in our physical and digital teaching and learning estate, education resources, and support spaces. All these developments have been co-designed by our students and our NSS Learning Resources score trajectory has reflected this investment and the importance of student co-design and consultation throughout: moving from below benchmark in Year 1, to above benchmark in each of the subsequent years, and improving our difference to the benchmark each year (+0.1 ppts in Year 2 to +0.9 ppts in Year 4).

We strive to ensure our estate and digital infrastructure matches, and reflects, the quality of our world-class research and KEE infrastructure and resources, and that it provides our educators, students, and support teams with all they need to create an outstanding learning environment. For example, our new, £52m purpose-built Centenary Building is dedicated to learning and teaching, adding premium social and learning spaces to our Highfield Campus. Furthermore, the recent purchase of a five-storey, city-centre teaching and learning building provides over 200 extra study spaces, more teaching spaces, an additional student support hub, and a purpose-designed space to engage our students with local communities and businesses. We have also invested over £5m in upgrading lab provisions for STEM subjects, created the welcoming and accessible Student Hub described in section 2.6, and a new, state-of-the-art £34m sports centre extension will open in early 2024. This is just the first stage in a major, 10-year investment in our estate which will see us invest over £600m in our campuses.

2.7.2. Digital has become a central aspect of our learning resources. In terms of technology investment, we have created 181 video capture-enabled learning spaces (using Panopto), 64 digitally enhanced classrooms (committing over £500,000 each year to this provision) and have spent over £4m on upgrades to our VLE (Blackboard) and student-focused systems over the last five years. Our students tell us our digital resources and infrastructure supports them to study flexibly and in a personalised way to suit their needs and preferred approaches. We therefore view and use our VLE as an integral extension of our classrooms and other learning spaces rather than an add-on or a resource repository. Our VLE Baseline, adopted in 2020, creates a simple, consistent structure and provides guidance on good practice for those designing their programme-specific VLE, and proved an excellent foundation for rapidly transitioning to high-quality, predominantly online education at the start of the pandemic.

"All the resources relating to the course are easily accessible across all devices and lecturers make the effort to provide extra reading materials to help with the content delivered. The University was fantastic at delivering online education during the pandemic and maintained the quality of the teaching throughout my three years at university."

(NSS, 2022)

We have embedded some of our digital innovations introduced during the pandemic as 'covid keeps'. These include innovative programme-specific learning resources; an online pre-arrival transitions module; more extensive use of digital modes of assessment; and a significant expansion of our library of e-learning materials. We also continue to offer an online learning hardship fund to ensure that students do not experience digital poverty.

Our students have been central to developing our digital learning resources and accessibility enhancements. The annual VLE Awards are student-led: this gives them the opportunity to tell us what matters and what practices and resources support their learning, which allows us to understand and disseminate good, student-centred practice. We have re-designed our Blackboard landing page based on a student design competition, and our digitally enhanced classrooms were a student and staff co-design project. Our students have told us our video-capture facilities are vital to their learning support. We now have facilities available in all common learning spaces, and data shows an increase in usage from 720,000 minutes in

"The use of Panopto being available for all students on my course. This was extremely positive and beneficial. It also made me enjoy the course more as I was able to re-watch the lectures properly and take all the information in at my own pace [...] It was also very important and useful for preparing for the exams."
(NSS, 2022)

2017/18 to over 31 million in 2020/21. Our coverage, whilst extensive, still falls below student expectations, so we have adopted a student-centred policy for the recording of teaching, and are working with academic staff to remove any real or perceived barriers.

2.7.3. Previous student NSS feedback had indicated a fragmented student experience in accessing and navigating Library resources, and we have taken concerted action to remedy this. We invest £14.5m per year into our libraries and learning resources, developing our collection and resources in response to the research-led demands of our staff and students; the requirements of our curricula; the need to balance physical and digital resources and the optimum location of physical collections; and the development of high-quality learning space. Our Library collection exceeds 1 million printed books, 673,000 eBooks, and 1,000 subscriptions (including print journal titles, eJournal packages, and databases). New streaming services, such as BFI Player and Kanopy, support off-air recording functionality via Box of Broadcasts. Multiple databases, ranging from business and legal to historical and geospatial, continue to grow. The Library's extensive and unique Archives and Special Collections (including the Wellington, Palmerston and Mountbatten papers and Anglo-Jewish Archives) are used to support studies in Humanities, Geography and Social Sciences, and at the Winchester School of Art.

Our main Library, the Hartley Library, is open 24/7 during term time. We have dedicated zones to meet demands for different study environments – from silent individual study to lively, collaborative group sessions. One of our Library locations has been transformed into a flexible learning environment focusing on Digital Humanities, providing access to specialist scanners, a 3D printer, a drone, and other audio-visual equipment for all students.

In 2020 we introduced a new reading list system fully integrated with our VLE, a new-to-market, sector-leading archival system and viewer, and, in 2022, a new Library Services Platform with a single search discovery layer across the Library and beyond. The Library also supports in-curriculum skills development and effective use of and understanding of resources for independent study, with over 12,000 undergraduate students benefitting from this approach in 2018-22. Our extensive use of digital reading lists is popular with students and has increased student engagement year on year: for example, reading list 'hits' increased from 32,711 (Sept 2021) to 49,814 (Sept 2022). Students can also access an unlimited free postal Library loan and returns service or use our responsive 'click and collect' ordering with pick up from their preferred location.

2.7.4. It is vital that our learning resources are accessible to all and tailored to the needs of our wide range of disciplines. Our Digital Learning Team is central to our excellence in this space. Our VLE Blackboard Ally project has ensured learning materials can be delivered and downloaded in different formats, introducing technology-enabled features to improve accessibility and inclusive learning. Our demographic split-level data shows improvements in satisfaction scores among our

students with disabilities at a more rapid rate than other groups, suggesting our students made good use of our resources alongside other learning support structures.

2.8: Engagement with students is embedded, leading to continuous improvement

2.8.1. Our students are our partners in their educational journey, as evidenced throughout this submission and, we believe, in the accompanying SUSU submission. We take a whole university approach to student engagement. For example, the Student President attends the University Executive Board and is a full member of the Senate and Council, and students are on all Boards and Committees that make decisions that impact education and student life. We also take a strategic approach to co-designing major projects, innovations, policies, and processes, as well as our programmes of study. Our education governance and quality assurance structures also ensure the student voice is heard, amplified, and foregrounded. This commitment is reflected in our data: we have been above benchmark in the NSS Student Voice, including all sub-questions, by between +0.9 and +2.2 in all four years of the assessment period.

2.8.2. We have taken a strategic approach to improvement by investing in our Student Engagement team and Student Communications team (described in section 2.6); increasing consultation, co-development and co-creation within teaching (described in 2.2 and 2.3); co-designing student support and our learning community (2.6) and our learning resources (2.7); and using student interns in our enhancement work within our SMPs (2.4). We recognise we can do even more to build on this success; current projects explore more effective ways to provide feedback on modules and how to make better use of Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLCs). These projects will help our students know that they are heard and valued and that we are acting upon their opinions and views and will also ensure consistency across all programmes.

2.8.3. We recognise SUSU's central role in co-creating an outstanding student experience. They help us identify ways to improve experience and outcomes and provide comprehensive and complementary services and resources for our students. Our students trust and value SUSU. Consequently, we support SUSU in developing and delivering interventions and activities where they are best placed to do so. We provide SUSU with the third-highest annual block grant in the sector to support an excellent student experience and effective student representation. SUSU runs our clubs and societies, co-runs most of our departmental societies, and co-delivers major events like Welcome and Graduation. When SUSU identifies what they need to do to maintain this excellence, we make that funding available where possible and support SUSU in delivery. For example, we provided an additional £1m to fund the SUSU belonging and engagement campaign post-pandemic, which undoubtedly contributed to our outstanding learning community satisfaction scores in the most recent NSS.

2.8.4. We have a comprehensive student representation system led by SUSU as our trusted partner. These reps support engagement and student feedback on their programmes through our feedback systems and are central to our programme review and validation processes. In addition, we support SUSU in amplifying the student voice through practices including the 'You Make Change' voting system, Town Hall meetings, student consultations on key issues, and regular meetings between the Student President, our President and Vice-Chancellor, and the Senior Executive Director for Students. We are very proud of the recent outstanding NSS satisfaction score of our Students' Union, rising by more than 10% (on a backdrop of a reduction across the sector). We believe this reflects our sustained commitment to SUSU and how they are integral to continuous improvement.

2.8.5. We regularly host panels of students with a lived experience of under-representation,

This model ensures students are involved in every stage of co-creation of our inclusion and participation work: from design and delivery through research and evaluation. We also take direction from our Awarding Gap Panel, which consists of students from Black ethnic backgrounds who oversee activities and interventions targeted at Black students to improve their experience and outcomes.

Areas of Good Practice in Student Engagement:

- The SSS is run parallel to the NSS, ensuring student views are obtained and considered across all years, and changes can be implemented before students reach their final year.
- Power BI reporting allows for widespread access to NSS and SSS results by staff across faculties.
- There is a clear structure for academic representation across taught courses, governed by the joint University of Southampton and SUSU Academic Student Representation Policy.
- Student representatives are included on panels for Programme Revalidation.
- Students from Widening Participation programmes are engaged through the Student Advisory Board (SAB) and reverse mentoring schemes.
- A co-design and insight panel has been commissioned to ensure student input is achieved during the development and design phases of major projects.

[KPMG Audit of Student Engagement, 2020](#)

Section 3: Student Outcomes

3.1: Ensuring successful futures for our students is at the heart of our ambitions. We are proud of our excellent outcome metrics and even prouder that the focused and consistent work we have done in this area is evident in our improving trajectory. All of our institution-level indicators in student outcomes are flagged as either Outstanding or Very High Quality, and while our outcomes were already very good, we have improved in all three indicators in the most recent year of data (continuation +0.1, completion +1.1 and progression +4.1).

Our education provides depth, breadth, choice, stretch and application of learning. When coupled with our tailored, high-quality education support, it creates outstanding outcomes. Our graduates are globally recognised and valued for the skills they gain from their time with us.

Our vision of a successful future for our students focuses on more than employability; it includes resilience, positive physical and mental wellbeing, and the skillset and mindset to change the world for the better. We want our students to graduate with the capability to develop well-informed, realistic plans for the future, with the skills to implement them in an ever-changing world.

While we have an international vision, we also see the University and its people as agents for local growth, transformation, and investment. Southampton is one of the most deprived areas of the South of England. Our students' contributions to the local community and industry begin while they are with us and accelerate when they become graduates. Our Triple Helix focus, commitment to hands-on experience, and engagement with local employers and community mean we expose students to a wide range of next-step possibilities in our local area. We have excellent employment and start-up opportunities on our doorstep, particularly in the engineering, maritime and creative industries: the Southampton area is in OfS quintile 5 for graduate employment. 15% of our graduates find employment locally in the Southampton Travel to Work Area (TTWA) with many connections and opportunities forged during their studies.

The characteristics of our activities, both inside and outside the programmes of study, make us outstanding in ensuring those successful futures. The following sections demonstrate that this

provision is planned, evidence-based, holistic, includes opportunities and inputs throughout the student lifecycle, harnesses our strengths, is tailored to the needs of our students, and leads to a range of outstanding outcomes.

3.2: Ensuring our students succeed in and progress beyond their studies

3.2 1. Graduate success is at the heart of our education and student experience endeavours. We have detailed how the distinctive benefits of our Triple Helix excellence enrich our curricula in sections 2.2-2.4, and how our holistic and accessible student support systems and resources recognise each student's unique circumstances and journey in section 2.6. This is enhanced by a rich and engaging co- and extra-curricular offer, a comprehensive focus on careers and successful futures, strong links with our community, and our civic and social responsibilities as a university. An institutional Employability Action Plan drives our activity in this space. We have created a new Careers, Employability and Student Enterprise Directorate to lead on this work, and have recently initiated an SMP entitled *Successful Futures*, establishing a strategic and sustained focus on continuous improvement in our students' outcomes.

3.2.2. At the very start of our students' journey, we comprehensively focus on preparing them for a good learning experience. Outputs from our *Enhancing Academic Support and Delivery* SMP include the student-co-designed *Southampton Y1 initiative*, which provides a framework for transition into HE and includes guidance on a wide range of centrally organised activities across pre-arrival, welcome, induction and the first year of studies, signposting to support available. This is complemented by a suite of programme-led transition activities focused on building community, peer support, and tailored guidance. For example, during the Womble Bond Dickinson Challenge, run with a local partner law firm, the entire first-year Law School cohort complete a presentation with second- and third-year student mentors, which is then judged by law professionals.

To ensure all students are ready to learn with us, we also offer a Pre-Sessional English programme and a range of foundation-level programmes for students with non-standard qualifications.

3.2.3. We begin focusing on careers and employability before students arrive - not just in their final year of study. We introduced Career Registration in 2021 to measure employability learning gain and to target our work in this area. We developed a Career Readiness Survey, based on our own research on the Southampton Graduate Capital Model, to help students identify where they are in their career planning. This data has allowed us to monitor career readiness, empowered students to act on this self-assessment, and enabled us to target interventions and closely monitor the impact of interventions. Our Careers, Employability and Enterprise team, which is fully integrated with our Student Hub, provide both general and subject-specific advice and a wide range of events for students and staff involved in programme design and delivery.

3.2.4. Employability, and opportunities to consider further study, are embedded in our programmes as described in section 2.4.1. Experience in KEE, research and innovation, work placements, years in industry and abroad, industry engagement in programme design and delivery, and a very significant number of PSRB-recognised programmes all help prepare our students for meaningful and impactful careers. At a programme level, our Maths students are offered applied dissertation projects with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) or with local schools. Over 400 of our Economics,

"The business for podiatrists module affords the students an opportunity to explore all aspects relating to establishing an independent podiatry practice."

Podiatry External Examiner (2020-21)

"Placement opportunities have enabled me to be the best nurse I can possibly be."

NSS, 2021

Business and Maths students learn key skills on our authentic Bloomberg Trading Floor each year. The *Business School Talent Development Programme*, launched in 2021, uses a portfolio tool to enable students to add and reflect on activities for additional awards, attend workshops and access career support aligned to our Graduate Capital Model. 300 students are currently signed up and engaging with this programme.

3.2.5. We recognise the importance of co-curricular opportunities to develop graduate employability and transferable skills. Our focus on enterprise and innovation, our Student Enterprise Team, sustainability internships and projects with businesses and the third sector, our Social Impact Lab, our sector-leading Future Worlds startup incubator facility, and our volunteering and work opportunities, all prepare students for their next steps. We further describe many of these opportunities and their impacts in section 4. We also support almost 50 highly engaged departmental societies with links to employers, researchers and KEE experts and alumni.

Mindful of the strong correlation between those students who have work experience and the likelihood of securing graduate-level employment, we offer a range of opportunities for our students to gain work experience including pro bono work, volunteering, paid work across the campus and residencies services, and both internal internships and physical and virtual external internships. Although the numbers were impacted by the pandemic, we supported over 500 undergraduate internships in 2017/18 and 2018/19, over 200 in 2019/20 and 300 in 2020/21.

3.2.6. As they approach the end of their undergraduate studies with us, we ensure students remain connected with the University, each other, and our alumni community to create networks and contacts to support success in their next steps. E-Mentoring Southampton provides students and recent graduates with access to career advice and expertise from a community of over 2,800 alumni mentors based in 84 countries. Creating a vital network for students and recent graduates planning careers in an unprecedented labour market, it enables them to access expert industry advice and grow their professional networks on a massive scale – with more than 2,500 engaging with the platform in just two years. Since its launch, the platform has facilitated 257 mentoring relationships and 5,487 instances of networking. Alumni mentors have given more than 6,000 hours of support, and 95% of platform users are returning repeatedly to give or receive career support. The platform also forms an integral part of the *Ignite Programme*: our alumni mentors can flag if they are from under-represented backgrounds, enabling our *Ignite* students to contact alumni with similar lived experiences for additional support and advice.

“E-Mentoring Southampton is probably one of the best, if not the best, things offered by the University of Southampton. It rivals my actual education itself. This, more than any other project I can think of the University runs, does more to improve its students' career outcomes and the University's status. If you want successful graduates who come back to mentor people and give you money as alumni which, in turn, allows you to climb the world rankings, this is how you make that happen.”




LLB Graduate, 2021

3.2.7. We work to ensure all students are supported to succeed both in and beyond their studies. We have invested in a dedicated Closing the Gap Careers Consultant role and developed an online module focused on mental health and career progression entitled ‘*Your Career, Your Mental Health*’. We have also initiated a new *Presidential Scholars Programme* that financially supports marginalised and under-represented students going into postgraduate study. We also provide a ring-fenced Opportunities Fund which provides financial support so that students from low-income households can enrich their learning and experiences. Students can apply for up to £750 which they can use towards field trips, conferences, international experiences, or additional courses which will support their development.




3.3: Outstanding rates of continuation and completion

3.3.1. Our continuation and completion indicators are excellent and on an upward trajectory, as described in section 3.1. The quality of our pastoral and academic support, and our varied range of learning resources, described in section 2, all contribute to this. Our ability to recognise problems early through engagement monitoring, as described later in 3.3.3, also helps to ensure students remain engaged with their programmes and have good outcomes.

Our student demographics split-level data shows that the performance of almost all groups is Outstanding or Very High Quality for all three Outcomes indicators.

Continuation, full-time	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Overall	Trend
Indicator	95.4	95.7	96.7	96.8	96.1	
Benchmark	95.2	95.3	95.4	95.6	95.4	
Diff to benchmark	0.1	0.4	1.3**	1.1**	0.7**	
TEF indicative performance	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	Outstanding	

Difference to CI is **Compelling; *Very strong

Completion, full-time	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Overall	Trend
Indicator	93.6	93.9	93.5	94.6	93.9	
Benchmark	94.3	94.5	94.4	94.5	94.4	
Diff to benchmark	-0.7	-0.6	-0.9*	0.1	-0.6	
TEF indicative performance	Very high	Very high	Very high	Very high	Very high	

Difference to CI is **Compelling; *Very strong

Figure 2: Continuation and Completion Performance Trend

We also have truly exceptional performance at subject level. For example, in our School of Engineering progression was 91.6% in 2017/18, 89.2% in 2018/19, and 92.0% in 2019/20. Progression is +10.7 ppts above benchmark in Performing Arts. 26 other subjects all have continuation rates of over 90%, with 18 of those 26 subjects having continuation rates of over 95%.

One in four students is enrolled on integrated master's programmes, and these students perform better than those in standard first degrees in all four indicators: continuation (97.4% vs 95.6%), completion (94.7% vs 93.7%), attainment (94.1% vs 86.1%) and progression (88.9% vs 76.0%). Our modules that promote interdisciplinary thinking are also associated with greater student engagement and preparing students well for their future lives. Over the assessment period, around 11% of our undergraduate students took one of these modules, and those students had better continuation (99.0% vs 95.7%) and completion (97.6% vs 93.1%) and better attainment (89.2% vs 87.4%) than other students.

Our performance in relation to benchmarks should be viewed in the context of our provision. 25% of our undergraduate programmes have postgraduate components; these students have exceptionally good completion rates, but this category of study has a very high benchmark. As identified in section 1, our part-time learners have typically switched to bespoke provision to give themselves the best possible outcome. Evidence shows that we are successful in this agile support strategy; our indicators for part-time students show performance well above benchmark and flagged as Outstanding. Finally, our commitment to Widening Participation means we accept a very broad range of qualifications at entry and try to make holistic entry judgements about our applicants. We are very proud of our outcomes for students from under-represented groups being as good as, and in many cases better than, the majority of students.

We have interrogated the small number of splits that are not flagged as Outstanding or Very High Quality, and are satisfied that, in the majority of cases, these are improving or that the data has low statistical significance. Our use of data dashboards will allow us to continue to monitor these disciplines and groups to ensure we maximise successful outcomes for all of our students.

3.3.2. Our ambition for all our students is for them to achieve good degree outcomes: 87.7% of our full-time undergraduates achieved first- or upper-second-class degrees over the assessment period. Whilst we have experienced some of the sector-wide effects of the pandemic on degree outcomes, we are committed to maintaining standards, and we monitor degree classifications against key internal and external reference points. We believe our awards reflect the quality of our students and their education. We are reassured to see our number of good degrees return to close to pre-pandemic levels in 21/22. We are also committed to reducing the awarding gaps for BAME, first-generation and Widening Participation students, and have an ongoing project underway with a series of workstreams addressing these gaps at both university and departmental levels.

“Academic standards and students’ demonstration of knowledge and understanding are in line with and indeed, surpass similar programmes elsewhere in the UK. Assessments are both innovative and academically rigorous, and challenge students to develop a vast range of key skills necessary to perform as elite industry practitioners.”

Fashion Marketing with Management
External Examiner (2021-22)

3.3.3. We care about our students and their success and invest in supporting them to remain with us and succeed. We have prioritised investment in a sector-leading 24/7/365 Student Hub, as described in section 2.6. Support from trained advisors is available in person, or through online chat, email, or telephone, at any time. In the academic year 2021/22, we helped our students resolve 7,827 queries in person and a further 70,376 queries through our digital channels. We have also invested in providing a 24/7/365 wellbeing service alongside the Student Hub. The team provide daily wellbeing drop-in services so that students can access wellbeing support when they need it. This is supported by a comprehensive suite of wellbeing services, including counselling, access to specialist sexual violence and harassment support, hypnotherapy, and a dedicated mental health nurse role within our University Health Service.

We understand building resilience and wellbeing is important in ensuring students can engage with their learning, so we have also invested in a *Be Active* programme which offers students access to free sports and wellbeing activities, and operate a sports referral scheme, linking a specialist sports wellbeing practitioner with students seeking wellbeing support and for whom activity would be beneficial. The British Active Student Survey in 2020 showed that an exceptional 78% of our students who responded were active in some way and recognised the wellbeing benefits of leading an active lifestyle.

We proactively identify students who may be at risk of disengagement and use an in-house Student Engagement Early Warning System to monitor levels of engagement with student life, connecting those who fall below a pre-determined level with our support services.

We understand that finances can often be a barrier to study, retention, and success, and therefore invest in providing targeted financial support, advice, and guidance to our students. In the academic year 2021/22 we invested £6.1m in bursaries, hardship funds and other financial support. We have used the OfS Financial Support Toolkit since 2016 to provide insight into the impact of our bursary programme in closing gaps in access, success, and progression for students from low-income households. Using the OfS data analysis tool and survey, and in-depth interview templates, we have identified, using this data, that our financial support package has a statistically significant impact on students’ continuation and completion of their programmes.

In 2022, in response to the UK cost of living crisis, we increased that investment by a further £570k and introduced new grants to support access to technology, a health and wellbeing fund to cover the costs of low-level, health-related costs, and a commuter fund to ensure students can access our campuses and their learning. This has been complemented by a range of additional measures, including increased access to warm spaces, subsidised catering, and increased

financial advice through the introduction of six new student money mentors. This provision has been recognised as an example of good practice in a recent [government publication](#).

3.3.5. We particularly focus on continuation and completion for our students from under-represented backgrounds. Students on our *Ignite Programme* are guaranteed an internship in their first year to develop key transferable skills which will support future applications for internships and wider employment. They are also offered the opportunity to travel abroad, broadening their experiences and developing networks with international organisations.

The *My Generation Career Coaching* programme, launched in 2019, addresses the unique challenges faced by first-generation students, preparing them for their transition into graduate labour markets and meeting their individual career goals. 180 students have participated in this year-long activity since 2019. Their self-confidence in careers increased by 39%, engagement with employment-enhancing activities almost doubled from 34% to 65%, and career-readiness data showed a 20% increase in the scale of measurement in psychometric analysis. The gap in terms of continuation for first-generation students improved from -2.6 pts for 2016 entrants to -0.4 pts for 2019 entrants. Based on the success of this work, we have recently set up a similar project as part of our Black Awarding Gap work. We also provide direct support through our careers consultant team for students from non-traditional groups; this includes providing tailored advice and guidance for disabled students, those who have a disclosed mental health condition or who are neurodivergent.

3.4: Outstanding rates of successful progression

3.4.1. Our progression metrics are Very High Quality, close to our benchmark, and improving. The proportion of our UK first-degree graduates entering professional destinations increased by 4 pts in 2022 (for 2019/20 graduates) to 80.1%, returning to close to pre-pandemic levels and reducing our gap to benchmark to -0.2.

Our internal data shows that our focus on the application of learning and built-in stretch is effective, as are our career-thinking and career-enhancing interventions.

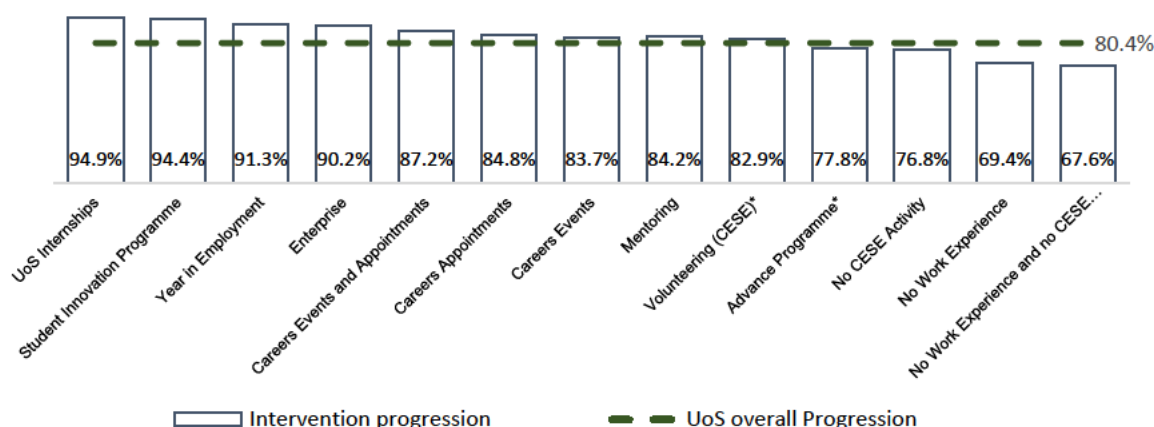


Figure 3: Graduate Outcomes 2019 Progression by Careers Intervention²

3.4.2. Our Careers Registration data gives us important insights and allows us to target intervention and activity to our students' intended next steps. Our data also shows our students have high levels of career readiness in their final year of study; 25% of respondents rate

² CESE = Careers, Employability and Student Enterprise; Progression rate using *Guardian* methodology; Excludes Medicine and Health Sciences due to near 100% destinations record and very low careers and employability interaction rates. Asterisk (*) indicates three-year aggregate used due to small sample size.

themselves as ‘completely sorted’. Our Careers and Employability Plan aims to significantly increase this number by introducing a sustained focus on ‘career thinking’ in and beyond our programmes of study.

3.4.3. The capabilities and orientations of our graduates are well matched to the needs of employers. We are a trusted provider of good-quality graduates. In four out of the last five years, we have been ranked in the top 20 UK universities targeted by graduate employers in the annual The Graduate Market report produced by High Fliers.

Our involvement in initiatives such as Formula Student has resulted in 30 permanent roles with Formula One teams in the last five years,

A student internship scheme in partnership with Octavius (a local Civil Engineering Infrastructure company) has seen eight participating students employed by the company in the last four years.

3.4.4. Our focus on KEE is evident in the career aspirations of our students. A third of our final-year students want to start their own business, rising to 40% of students in the Arts and Humanities. We have therefore reinforced activities that bring our undergraduate students and KEE activity closer together. For example, we have increased the capacity and physical space devoted to our Student Enterprise Team; expanded the scale of our design shows in Engineering and Winchester School of Art; and increased our student-focused public engagement activities such as the Southampton Institute for Arts and Humanities (SIAH).

Our inspiring, research-rich environment encourages our students to consider an academic future. This is reflected in our progression to further study rate (15%) which is particularly impressive considering more than 20% of our students graduate from programmes where master’s-level study is already integrated into their first degree

Section 4: Educational Gains

4.1: We consider the education gains of our students as the knowledge, experiences, perspectives, motivations, capabilities, competencies, and values they draw from their time within our community. Many of those gains have been described in previous sections: we have identified how our education stretches and inspires our students; is enriched by learning in a research and KEE-rich environment; is supported through our commitment to excellent learning resources and environments; and is augmented by an excellent and engaging co-curriculum offer.

Some educational gains – such as critical analysis, analytic reasoning, problem-solving, academic writing, digital literacy, and research and referencing skills – are thoughtfully embedded in our research and KEE-rich programmes of study. Others are developed through our comprehensive engagement with industry, employers, and our local community through our broader curricular offers, as well as through engagement with our rich co-curriculum that has been co-created and is co-delivered with SUSU. All of this is underpinned by support for students to develop their career thinking, linking their developing range of experiences to their career ideas and aspirations.

At the heart of our ambitious intended educational gains for our undergraduate students are the four pillars described below. For each pillar, we demonstrate how we support students to achieve these ambitious outcomes in an evidence-based, highly effective, and tailored way.

4.2: Learning gains from our Triple Helix excellence

As already described, our students gain valuable additional capabilities through learning in, and from, a research, enterprise, and knowledge exchange-rich community where people are valued for a range of contributions to excellence. Our support for student researchers is described in sections 2.4 and 2.7. Student involvement in KEE, and support for students aiming for a future in the innovation economy, is a considerable benefit of learning at our University. Led by a dedicated Student Enterprise Team that helps students make the most of the people, expertise, and connections available, a range of spaces, services and resources are available to enhance these learning opportunities, including the following examples.

- Future Worlds provides a dedicated on-campus accelerator space where students work alongside academics and researchers to develop start-up ideas. Beyond a wide range of engaging events and support for student enterprise and innovation offered, the intensive *Future Worlds Cohort* programme provides six months of intensive support for students who are ready to accelerate their startup idea. The founders of startups in the last two Future Worlds cohorts have gone on to raise over £2.5m in investment and funding, land top customers, and enter programmes like the Royal Academy of Engineering Enterprise Fellowship and the Innovate UK Young Innovators Award.
- The Student Enterprise Team supports students in developing their innovation and enterprise ideas. They offer both drop-in and appointment-based support, and month-long Student Innovation Projects working with employers in groups (involving up to 200 students per year); enable final-year research projects with business and the third sector; and support students in preparing for our University-wide 100 Big Ideas competition and to be successful in international innovation competitions like Enactus (see 4.5 below).
- Fish On Toast, which is a student-led entrepreneurship society, is currently in its 20th year with over 200 members. It runs a Welcome Event with over 150 attendees, weekly workshops, a Startup Series (designed to show newcomers the steps to starting a business and creating a network of fellow entrepreneurs), and an annual pitching competition. It regularly invites other business-related student societies to collaborate and delivers joint activities with the Student Enterprise Team.

“The impact Fish on Toast has had over the past years I think would be the community that has been created. Our members are from a very diverse background all of which on different courses. This has created an environment which is ideal to make connections that could help later on down the line, along with great current friendships.”
Student President of Fish on Toast

4.3: A focus on real-world application of learning

Application of their learning enables our students to use and share their learning and develop a problem-solving and entrepreneurial skillset that will allow them to thrive in contemporary workplaces.

4.3.1. As described in section 2, we make extensive use of placements, focus on PSRB-accredited programmes (with their built-in applicability to professions), have programmes that include a year in industry across a broad number of disciplines, and include study abroad options (particularly in our Modern Languages, English and Medicine programmes). Students who participate in either study abroad or placement opportunities tend to have better outcomes than students who don't. For example, completion rates for study abroad or placement students are over 99% compared to 93.2% for students who did neither, while students who completed placements had progression

rates that were 9.8 percentage points higher than average. These effects are enhanced if the student was also enrolled on an integrated master's programme as identified in section 3.3.

We aim to promote the application of learning both within and beyond the curriculum across all our disciplines. The Business School uses *Riipen*: a platform that enables industry contacts to set assignments for taught modules, with students receiving real-world briefs and feedback from industry. In Environmental Sciences, in collaboration with the Social Impact Lab (see section 4.5), local businesses and charities can submit sustainability challenges for individual and student teams to work on as final-year projects. Recent examples include students developing a sustainability strategy and corporate social responsibility policy for a local charity. In Medicine, students have the opportunity to complete and implement a real-world Health Improvement Project as part of their programme.

4.3.2. Students can also develop vital leadership and workplace skills through employment with us as student ambassadors and interns, taking part in student panels, or supporting the delivery of events such as Open Days, Welcome and Graduation. Thousands of students undertake this work with us, including over 1,000 regularly working as Student Ambassadors. We also have over 2,500 students in leadership positions as student reps, club and society leaders, members of our student panel group, and elected student officers. By offering additional training to this group of student leaders in collaboration with SUSU, we are supporting the development of their transferable skills, and our accompanying SUSU submission proves that engagement with SUSU sees higher attainment and progression levels. *Ignite* internships, as described in section 3.3.5. are also central to ensuring access to these application of learning opportunities.

In Economics and Finance, we have encouraged students to participate in work simulations such as the Bloomberg Global Trading Challenge. Internationally, almost 950 teams took part in five weeks of trading this year, and three University of Southampton teams were ranked top 10 globally, with one team taking the prestigious first place. In Oceanography, we hand over our research vessel to students for them to run oceanographic sampling investigations. Access to research vessels is a rare opportunity, but we believe handing command to a small group of students creates further, real-world learning from this resource.

4.4: Ensuring successful futures

We achieve this through personalising learning opportunities described in section 2.3.2; longitudinal attention to career thinking, our employability and career readiness focus described in section 3.2; and supporting the development of transferable skills and credentials. Our approach allows students to direct and supplement their learning and prepare for their unique career futures, and for us to tailor our support to areas of need.

4.4.1. Students need to be able to capture their learning and communicate this with future employers. Where possible we have increased external validation and credentialing of learning, and enabled extra credit recognition in specific disciplines or career areas, both in our programmes of study and the co-curricular offer. We have a huge range of examples of this in action: Archaeology has adopted a skills documentation 'passport' to 'sign off' excavation, survey and other skills gained during student participation in fieldwork activities; students on our BSc Marketing can become certificated in social media marketing and social media planning; all Economics and some Maths and Business students taking the Principles of Macroeconomics module complete the Bloomberg Market Concepts (BMC) course, which contributes to their final module mark and results in a certificate of completion from Bloomberg LP; students on the BSc Healthcare Science (Audiology) become registered Hearing Aid Dispensers; medical students complete a Year 2 Healthcare Support Worker placement that allows them to work as support

workers during the rest of their training; students taking the Introduction to Scientific Diving module can work towards their BSAC Ocean Diver qualification; and our student clubs and societies offer coaching badges, lifeguard training and language learning, including British Sign Language (BSL).

4.4.2. The pandemic and post-pandemic era have reinforced the need for us to prepare our students for a digital future. We do this through our digital education practice – using digital tools and techniques they will need to master for their future careers, integrating a diverse range of digital tools in our learning resources and ‘reading’ lists, and engaging them in the design of digital assessment and teaching as part of our ‘covid keeps’ process. As described in section 2.7, we use the VLE as an extension of the physical learning and collaboration space, and have created a seamless incorporation of a range of tools such as Microsoft Teams, our timetabling app, and Panopto, allowing students to develop skills for the contemporary workplace as they study. As a ‘covid keep’ our academics have continued to use the digital space to allow industry experts to join the class from anywhere in the world and share their professional expertise. Our LinkedIn Learning resources have been extensively curated and mapped to both programme learning outcomes and other learning needs identified by students, and the usage trajectory over the four years to 2021/22 shows that students find our tailored approach accessible and engaging, with over 9,322 hours of usage reported in 2021-22. We also use digital tools to provide student services, support, and resources wherever possible. We provide digital skills training within and beyond our programmes and Digital Badges have been adopted by 10 of our disciplines. Our BA Fashion Marketing with Management has built in the learning required for all students to achieve a professional certificate in Digital Marketing.

4.4.3. We recognise that support for successful futures needs to be tailored to our diverse student body. We have a dedicated Student Inclusion Team which begins contact with students from under-represented groups before arrival. Students from IMD Q1 postcodes, on our *Ignite Programme*, who are care experienced or are young carers, and mature students all have a dedicated named coordinator who offers to meet them throughout their time with us, signposting them to support and linking them to opportunities across the University. We also provide tailored support and activities for neurodiverse, mature, care leavers, parents, and BAME students. Offering both online and in-person events helps students to meet peers, hear from students with similar lived experiences and make contact with key University services and alumni.

4.5 Shaping civically engaged and socially aware citizens

We want our students to change the world around them for the better, so part of our intended educational gains is to influence how our students think about, connect with, and contribute to the world around them. Below are some examples of the many ways this is achieved.

- The Social Impact Lab provides both a multidisciplinary module and a series of local and international projects. It has engaged over 3,300 students throughout this assessment period. Beyond the impact it has on students’ engagement with social and societal challenges, 90% of participants have said they feel more confident about their career direction, 85% feel more engaged with their studies, and 95% feel it has enhanced their University experience. On our most recent international activity, Spark India, students reported an average 35% increase in their leadership skills, such as problem-solving, creativity, resilience, and collaboration.
- Our sustainability commitment is a green thread that runs throughout our community and activities. Our sustainability focused education activity is described in section 2.3.2. Beyond this, we engage students in events such as Sustainability Week, our Sustainability Challenge, *Blackout* (where students lead an energy reduction initiative), and the opportunity to publish their work in *Meliora: International Journal of Student Sustainability Research*.

- Our students develop transferable skills, civic and social awareness and an understanding of diversity through our extensive volunteering offer. Examples include Saturday Art and Design Club – a nationally coordinated programme supporting young people’s engagement with art; reading support in schools; Lifelab – a unique, state-of-the-art teaching laboratory dedicated to improving adolescent health by giving school students opportunities to learn first-hand the science behind health messages; and SO14 – a project with communities from our most deprived postcode. These projects, and more, make a difference to our community while our students make valuable learning and employability gains.
- We run several projects dedicated to improving access to higher education. Our Schools Tutoring and EPQ Support Project, focused on school and college learners from under-represented groups, is mainly supported by our own Widening Participation students. Furthermore, our Learn with US (Access) programme, designed to support students, parents and teachers from low participation neighbourhoods, saw over 1,300 students supporting over 5,500 pupils in 250 schools and colleges last academic year.
- Our students have the opportunity to join Enactus Southampton: a student-led social enterprise organisation that operates a portfolio of four businesses. Each year over 70 students tackle the 17 Sustainable Development Goals by creating social enterprises focused on people, the planet, and prosperity. In the last four years, Enactus Southampton has been consistently recognised as one of the top four social enterprise societies in the UK. Enactus Southampton also has a global presence, and Southampton was ranked in the top four teams globally in 2021.

The WSA Saturday Club, co delivered by staff and students at WSA, aims to offer students from disadvantaged backgrounds the opportunity to explore, experiment and study a range of art and design disciplines within a HE environment. This is achieved by guaranteeing places to schools who catchment areas align with the POLAR4 Q5 zones.

Summary

This submission reflects the successes of our students and those who support them in their education journey, and identifies the impact of our activities, including where we need greater focus and innovation to ensure even better experiences and outcomes for all of our students. It provides evidence of an institution working in partnership with its students to provide an outstanding and impactful education.

References

Economic Impact | Community | University of Southampton; Digital Teaching and Learning Review - Office for Students; [Times Higher – How to Support Staff Across all Departments to Design Quality Online Courses](#); KPMG blended learning audit report -commissioned 2020; OfS catalyst B funding final report 2019; [Value and power: perceptions of Education Focused academic careers in research intensive universities](#); Southampton-TTWA-with-city tcm71-405744.jpg (3506×2481); A geography of employment - Office for Students; The Graduate Capital Model | Careers, Employability and Student Enterprise | University of Southampton; British Active Student Survey, University of Southampton; KPMG student engagement audit report, February 2022; Department of Education Press release: [Cost of living boost for students](#); ; Department of Education Press release: [Cost of living boost for students](#); The Graduate Market report produced by High Fliers