

St Mary's University, Twickenham
Institutional Submission for the Teaching Excellence Framework 2023

1. Provider context

1.1 Institutional context

1.1.1 St Mary's was established in 1850 to train teachers for the Catholic Poor Schools. Training teachers remains a vital part of our DNA and our mission, with 482 undergraduate Initial Teacher Education (ITE) students in 2021/22 and a further 534 studying at postgraduate level. Our ITE provision has consistently been rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted and St Mary's was one of only a third of ITE providers to be reaccredited at the first attempt last year as part of the Government's ITE Market Review. St Mary's is a Catholic university, with an inclusive ethos where all students from all faiths or none are welcome and valued. Our small community occupies a green campus in Strawberry Hill, Twickenham. Altogether, 5,870 students, including foundation year students, undergraduate students, Masters students, and postgraduate research students are studying for St Mary's awards. Our community embraces four key values: generosity of spirit, excellence, respect and inclusiveness. These inform our institutional strategy *Vision 2030*. We pride ourselves on providing an outstanding student experience for all our undergraduate students (see Section 2). Our 'Face-to-Face PLUS' Learning & Teaching Strategy (see para 2.4.4) ensures that the campus experience and in-person teaching are at the heart of our programmes, but with online elements integrated where these add value and flexibility for students. There is a strong sense of community - we get to know our students well, and they get to know us. All undergraduates are able to access outstanding levels of support throughout their studies (see Section 2), as well as excellent sport facilities and co-curricular activities, and these promote strong student outcomes (see Section 3).

1.1.2 St Mary's has seen significant changes in the composition of its student body over the past four years. In line with our previous corporate strategy *Vision 2025*, the number of Masters and postgraduate research students has grown. We were awarded Research Degree Awarding Powers in 2021. A tough market for undergraduate recruitment has resulted in a decrease in the proportion of students studying on undergraduate programmes from 71.4% in 2017/18 to 61.8% in 2021/22. The number of full-time undergraduate students reduced from 3,680 in 2017/18 to 3,450 in 2021/22. The balance between the percentage of full-time and part-time students has remained stable over the past five years at roughly 80% full-time and 20% part-time. Our total student body has grown by 550 students in the last five years, from 5,320 in 2017/18 to 5,870 in 2021/22.

1.1.3 St Mary's portfolio of undergraduate programmes remains similar to that which existed in 2017 but a dynamic portfolio review process (led on an annual basis by the Provost) is continually reshaping our offer in response to demand. We have maintained, for example, a strong emphasis on sport-related programmes (a growing number have PSRB accreditation) and areas like creative arts, media and communications, and business. In contrast to some universities, St Mary's has retained its humanities provision and introduced a new BA Liberal Arts degree in 2020 which is available in an innovative, accelerated two-year format. Over the past four years the percentage of 'commuter students' has varied between 31 and 42 percent, and they have access to a dedicated 'Commuter Lounge' (see para 2.5.4) that provides a 'home from home'.

1.1.4 Over the past five years dedicated access work as part of our Access and Participation Plan has resulted in a 4.3 percentage point rise in the proportion of UK domiciled undergraduate students from BAME backgrounds. The University recognises that the proportion of Asian students falls below that for other London universities and does not yet reflect the size of the local Asian

population. The proportion of undergraduate students who are White has fallen from 69.7% to 65.6%. The proportion of White students at St Mary's is now three percentage points lower than the sector average of 69%. BAME students accounted for 33.7% of our undergraduate population in 2021/22, which means there is a 31.9 percentage point gap between our BAME and White student populations. Reducing this gap by increasing recruitment of BAME students is a key priority, and steps are being taken to bring us into alignment with benchmark for London universities. This includes developing new franchise collaborative partnerships with other UK-based providers. The University has launched three new franchise partnerships in 2022 with the London Professional Training College, Regent College London and The Language Gallery.

1.1.5 Our commitment to widening participation is reflected in the creation of a dedicated WP team in our Centre for Teaching Excellence and Student Success (CTESS). We have committed 24% of our higher student fee income (above the £6,250 cap) to the delivery of our Access & Participation Plans every year since 2017/18 and have set ambitious goals relating to the closure of access, success and progression gaps. The success of this strategy is evidenced in growing percentages of students from under-represented backgrounds, including increases in the percentage of mature full-time First Degree student intake from 19.9% in 2017/18 to 26.6% in 2021/22 (5.6 percentage points above our target), and an increase in Asian full-time First Degree intake from 7.5% in 2017/18 to 9.9% in 2021/22 (on target). Students with a declared disability accounted for 19% of St Mary's Undergraduate population in 2021/22, 5.3 percentage points above the previous year's average for London universities. Our commitment to WP is also reflected in the establishment in 2017/18 of our level 3 Foundation Year which has recruited over 550 students up to 2021/22.

1.1.6 Widening participation initiatives are designed, planned and evaluated using our own and sector research and examples of best practice. Our 'Outreach' team in CTESS runs a wide range of engagement activities both independently and in collaboration with organisations such as *AimHigher* and *Linking London*. Of particular note is their work with care experienced students through virtual schools and our own *First Star Academy* (see para 1.1.8 below), with parents and leaders in community and faith settings, our Year 9 residential summer school and the National Saturday Clubs Youth Theatre.

1.1.7 As well as winning 'Outreach Practitioner of the Year' for three consecutive years, in 2022 we also won 'Institution of the Year', 'Ambassador of the Year', 'Outstanding Contribution' and 'Aimhigher Champion' categories at the *Aimhigher* Practitioner Awards. Our Access & Participation (APP) targets are embedded within all programme design, approval and review processes and we run a successful programme of engagement, enhancement and support activities. WP initiatives run across the year including Induction (September), Wobble Week (November), Reconnect Week (January), 'Student Engagement Awards', mental health first aid training for student leaders, and two Offs-funded mental health and well-being projects. Student input into these has been facilitated by new paid student roles, including a Student Experts Panel (see para 2.4.7). The Students' Union has also been involved through the introduction of new, paid 'Subject Chair' roles (see para 2.4.7) as well as ongoing work with the elected officers.

1.1.8 As a Catholic university, our commitment to social justice goes beyond enabling access to our own undergraduate programmes. This is demonstrated by the University's participation in the *First Star Academy*. This pioneering initiative was established at St Mary's in 2017, to work with looked after children from the age of 14 to 18, supporting their educational progress, providing academic tutoring and mentoring, as well as life skills and emotional resilience, to help the children

progress academically and personally, and get into university or an FE college. The results have been outstanding, with three times more First Star students going straight to University (55%) than expected for looked after children (13%), and indeed the number progressing into Higher Education was higher than the national average of non-looked after children. *First Star Academy* is a concrete manifestation of the University's core values.

2. Student experience

2.1 Feedback from the National Student Survey (NSS)

NSS scores over the past five years

2.1.1 St Mary's has established a distinguished reputation for the outstanding quality of its teaching and learning and this is reflected in student feedback captured annually by the National Student Survey (NSS). Participation in the NSS by our final year students has been strong and consistent since 2018 ranging between 72.0% and 74.4%. A summary of our performance in NSS surveys between 2019 and 2022 is contained in **Table 1**. This reveals an outstanding level of institutional performance over the last four years. St Mary's ranking for the NSS question 'Teaching on my course' has never fallen below a ranking of 36th and, in 2022, we were ranked 8th in the sector. Likewise, our ranking for 'Learning opportunities' has seen a significant upward lift from 55th in 2020, to 3rd in the entire sector in 2022. The University has also improved its 'Assessment and feedback' ranking over the past three years from 53rd to 15th. The work of our programme teams to diversify assessment and improve student feedback is reflected in the comments of many of our external examiners. For example, the external examiner for the BSC Sport Rehabilitation (accredited by BASRaT) noted: *"a wide range of assessment methods are employed to allow students to demonstrate all aspects of their knowledge, skills and attributes... There are many examples of high-quality feedback... and staff should be commended for their efforts"*.

2.1.2 The University has maintained positive relations with our Students' Union and has worked closely with sabbatical officers to facilitate the student voice. Our ranking for Student Voice has risen from 32nd in 2018, to 7th and then 5th in the two most recent surveys. The University has out-performed the average figures for all NSS questions in London universities over the past three years, and has out-performed the sector in every category except one (Learning Resources).

NSS Question Groups	St Mary's NSS Scores				Sector			London
	2019	2020	2021	2022	Average 2022	Rank 2022	Decile 2022	Average 2022
The teaching on my course	85.7%	86.7%	84.9%	85.4%	79.7%	8 th	1	78.7%
Learning opportunities	86.0%	83.9%	84.2%	85.7%	79.1%	3 rd	1	78.0%
Assessment and feedback	74.1%	73.8%	73.6%	76.3%	68.4%	15 th	2	65.9%
Academic support	83.0%	83.8%	78.6%	81.8%	73.6%	6 th	1	71.1%
Organisation/management	72.5%	76.1%	78.3%	80.3%	68.9%	4 th	1	66.1%
Learning resources	84.9%	84.8%	79.7%	78.4%	80.5%	102 nd	8	77.8%
Learning community	81.0%	80.0%	78.6%	79.1%	68.5%	4 th	1	65.3%
Student Voice	76.3%	78.9%	75.5%	77.0%	66.8%	5 th	1	64.2%
Overall satisfaction	84.3%	85.9%	81.0%	83.9%	75.5%	11th	1	72.3%

Table 1
St Mary's Scores in the National Student Survey 2019-2022

2.1.3 In the 2022 NSS, for 'overall satisfaction' St Mary's rose 7 places to 11th in the sector rankings of UK universities and the University ranks 2nd amongst London universities. Our 'overall satisfaction' score in NSS 2022 is 8.4 percentage points higher than the average for the higher education sector and 11.6 points higher than London-based universities. Although the University continues to perform above the London average in relation to the question on 'Learning Resources', St Mary's declined from a ranking of 15th last year on this question to 102nd this year. Internal analysis suggests two causes for this: insufficient library investment in a small number of subject areas and a reduction in 2022 in the usage of Lecture Capture following a return to in-person teaching. The University is consequently carrying-out a comprehensive review of learning resources (including the use of Lecture Capture) to improve our performance in this area, and has already committed to a 19% (£80k) increase in the Library budget for 2022/23.

2.2 Feedback from our students on the NSS COVID-19 questions

2.2.1 It is clear from responses to the five COVID-specific questions in the 2021 NSS that students felt the support they received from our staff was exceptional (see **Table 2**).

Category	St Mary's	Sector	Variance
Q1. I have received useful information about changes to my course	82.2%	73.1%	+9.1pp
Q2. I have received timely information about my course	73.9%	63.8%	+10.1pp
Q3. My university has taken sufficient steps to support my mental wellbeing	59.5%	41.9%	+17.6pp
Q4. My university has taken sufficient steps to protect my physical safety	86.4%	79.8%	+6.6pp
Q5. I am content with the delivery of learning and teaching of my course	57.8%	47.6%	+10.3pp
Q6. I have been able to access the learning resources I need for my course	79.8%	78.1%	+1.7pp

Table 2

Student responses to COVID questions in the 2021 NSS. Number in bold show the margin by which St Mary's out-performed the average for the UK higher education sector.

2.2.2 St Mary's outperformed the average for the UK higher education sector on all of the COVID-specific questions with the highest positive variance (COVID3, relating to student wellbeing) 17.6 percentage points above the average for the rest of the UK sector. The values and focus of organisations are often tested during a crisis – St Mary's showed that it was able to maintain both its focus on the student experience and its four key values during the COVID pandemic.

Focus for future enhancement

- Targeted enhancements to learning resources in specific programmes.
- Increase usage of Lecture Capture

2.3 Feedback from our external examiners

2.3.1 An external examiner is appointed to every undergraduate programme at St Mary's, and they play an important role in supporting a culture of ongoing quality enhancement. Feedback from our external examiners has been extremely positive over the past four years, as reflected in the following comments:

- BA Liberal Arts – *"The blending of different disciplines across the programme is impressive and a model for other institutions wanting to adopt a Liberal Arts approach. The best students move confidently between different disciplines producing work which is truly interdisciplinary. This is a credit to the teaching team and programme lead".*

- BA Sports Management – *“The programme team should be commended for the quality of the learning experience offered to students. The applied nature of the programme provides insight into the sports industry that creates a realistic appreciation of the sector...”*.
- BSc Criminology and Sociology – *“It is a credit to the team involved that they provide such a diverse and interesting programme to their students, in a professional (e.g. design, content and assessment) and student-focused manner”*.

Each programme receives a formal report from their external examiner, and writes a response that feeds into the annual Programme Board and an enhancement plan for each programme. External assessors also serve on all our validation and re-validation panel events.

2.4 Our learning and teaching ‘ecosystem’

2.4.1 Excellence in learning and teaching is at the heart of the student experience at St Mary's and this is supported by a multi-faceted learning and teaching ‘ecosystem’:

2.4.2 Our campus

Over the past four years a number of campus enhancement projects have been completed. For example, new social learning spaces, a new Student Hub, and additional group study ‘pods’ have been integrated into our Library. Phase 1 of our ‘Student Heart’ project – completed between 2021 and 2022 - has created a range of new study areas, including ten additional group-work ‘pods’, which are intensively used by students (see **Figure 2**). Phase 2 will commence shortly. The plans have been co-created via wide student consultations and partnership with our Students’ Union.

2.4.3 Creation of the Centre for Teaching Excellence & Student Success

Our Centre for Teaching Excellence and Student Success (established 2018) brought together three teams: academic professional development, quality and standards and widening participation. CTESS has been a critical agent of progressive change at St Mary's over the past four years and led the development of our UG Curriculum Framework, our Learning & Teaching Strategy as well as our Access and Participation Plan (APP) and Student Retention Strategy.

2.4.4 Our Learning and Teaching Strategy

Our *Learning & Teaching Strategy 2020/21-2025/26ⁱⁱ* sets out the path St Mary's will take over the next five years to ensure we are able to provide a truly distinctive student experience that draws on our traditional strengths whilst taking advantage of the opportunities that new technologies provide to teach and support student learning in new ways. A ‘Face-to-face PLUS’ approach is central to our Strategy in which in-person, class-based teaching and learning on our campus remains a key feature of the student experience, whilst integrating online elements (and the valuable lessons learned from the COVID period about blended teaching) that ‘add value’ and enhance flexibility for our students. The Strategy focuses on four distinctive themes: i) Digital Transformation, ii) Teaching Practices, iii) Learning Environment and iv) Programme Design. These themes will shape the future education of our students.

2.4.5 Our Academic Regulations and Programme Approval Processes

The University's Academic Regulations are reviewed regularly. For example, a review of our regulations on academic integrity during 2019/20 resulted in significant enhancements including the introduction of online mandatory training modules on academic integrity for all students, the introduction of staff Academic Integrity Leads (AILs) in each academic department who lead on sharing best practice, and the use of the new Turnitin ‘Authorship’ tool to detect contract cheating. All programmes at St Mary's are approved via a rigorous programme approval process which

includes input from employers and sector experts. The written validation document is required to demonstrate how each programme is aligned with relevant sector reference points, such as QAA subject benchmarks, PSRB requirements, the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), the UK Quality Code. Validation documents are scrutinised by a 'panel' that includes academic staff, members of our quality and standards team, students and a subject expert from another University. The same approach is taken with respect to the approval of any new collaborative partnership programme. The University believes that the way our central services (e.g. Library, Employability Services) feed into the development of new programme proposals can be improved, so we will be ensuring that Programme Design Intensives (PDIs) are part of every course developed from 2022/23 to facilitate a critical dialogue earlier-on in the design process.

2.4.6 Students as partners and co-creators in programme and policy enhancement

The student voice is central to our approach to enhancement and there are multiple mechanisms that enable students to identify how the student experience can be improved. This is reflected in **Figure 1** below.

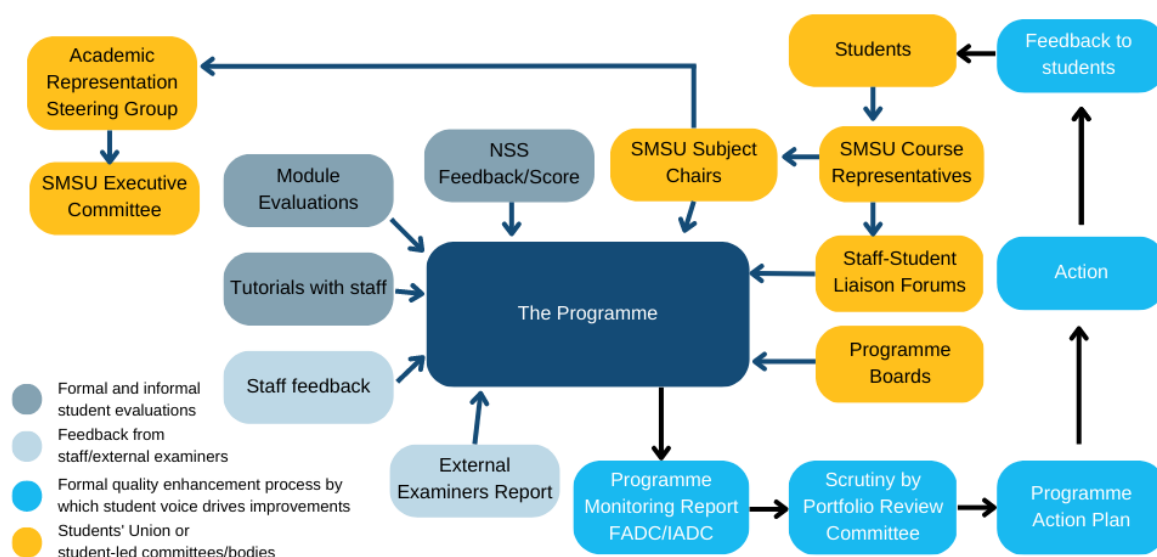


Figure 1

How the student voice is facilitated and drives enhancement at St Mary's.

These processes can also enable issues beyond the programme to be identified and addressed.

2.4.7 Student representatives are elected for each programme and receive training for their role. Elected representatives also serve on our Faculty and Institute Academic Development Committees, and student representatives (including SMSU sabbatical officers) serve on the vast majority of University committees and working groups. Student-Staff Liaison Forums provide opportunities on a bi-annual basis for programmes representatives to identify issues for our programme teams to address. We also employ mid-module and end of module evaluations to identify areas for enhancement (and to reinforce what we do well). Regular student evaluations, strong student representation at programme level, student involvement in Programme Review Boards and robust student-staff forums, ensure that collaborative partnership and 'co-creation' are the norm. New student 'Subject Chair' roles were introduced in 2022, with one for each Faculty/Institute. The Subject Chairs provide peer support to course representatives, and improve communication between them and the Student Union. Students are represented on key University committees, working groups and boards. For example, the Student Union Education President

serves on both our Academic Development Committee, and our Academic Board, and past SU Presidents have played key roles in major reviews (e.g. a review of our degree classification algorithms in 2020/21). Post-COVID students told us they wanted more face-to-face teaching, so we launched a new Learning and Teaching Strategy called '*Face-to-Face PLUS*' to keep in-person campus-based learning at the core of our teaching, while retaining the best of the flexibility that online platforms offer. Students told us they wanted more social spaces to work in, so we invested in the Student Heart Project which provides a modern and flexible social study space to support collaborative learning. A new Student Experts Panel was established in 2022 and provided feedback on drafts of this TEF submission, alongside SMSU's Subject Chairs.

2.4.8 Assessment & feedback

All assessments at St Mary's are required to conform to our *Assessment Policy*ⁱⁱⁱ (updated in September 2020) which sets-out 15 key principles of inclusive practice that inform assessment and feedback practices across all programmes. Essays, examinations, practical exercises, group assessments, presentations and projects, are commonplace, but many other types of assessment are used. Some are completed in placement contexts. Dissertations are widely used across the University, alongside policy reviews, consultancy reports, posters, vivas and portfolios. This diversity in assessment means that students contend with fresh challenges on each module, and have to adapt their skills and learning to address them. It also creates a more inclusive learning environment in which all students have opportunities to demonstrate their learning and their unique experiences, whilst building the transferable skills they need for the workplace. The University provides a standardised set of 'Marking Descriptors' (Marking Scales)^{iv} which are informed by sector guidance and used across all undergraduate programmes to ensure consistent standards. Feedback provided to students on their assessments is excellent, as evidenced earlier in this section, and is consistently provided within 15 working days.

2.4.9 Our Undergraduate Curriculum Framework

Our 'Curriculum Framework' was designed in 2018/19 in consultation with our students, staff and employers (see **Figure 3** overleaf). It is aligned with our *Learning and Teaching Strategy* referred to above (see para 2.4.4). It informs all of our undergraduate programmes at St Mary's. The Curriculum Framework embraces not only a set of 'effective teaching practices' (informed by research on inclusive pedagogies) but also 'fundamental literacies' that apply to both staff and students. The 'soft skills' are aligned with the needs of employers and those skills promoted by the World Economic Forum (WEF) in a major study on graduate skills^v.

2.4.10 The role of personal tutors in supporting an excellent student experience

A personal tutoring policy was developed and implemented in 2017/18, covering all undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, with every student having a personal tutor who provides academic and pastoral support. We support Personal Tutors in their role by providing a range of training and

sharing good practice opportunities. Whilst the Personal Tutoring Policy provides an important mechanism by which students' diverse needs are supported, we recognise that the system has worked more effectively in some areas than in others. Consequently, the University is currently undertaking a comprehensive review of the Policy in 2022/23.

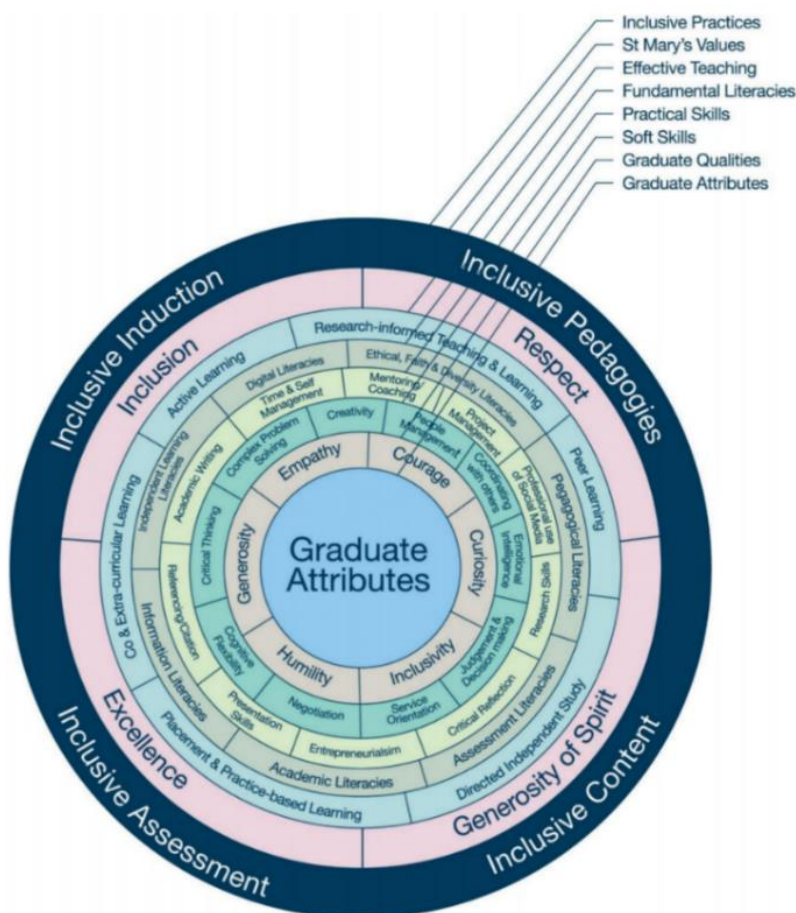


Figure 3

Our undergraduate Curriculum Framework.

The Framework embraces a set of 'values' and 'graduate qualities' (e.g. empathy, curiosity, courage and humility) that ensure our students are well-placed to secure graduate roles and make a positive contribution to society. The Framework includes university-wide optional modules (e.g. *Enterprise and Entrepreneurship*) focused on building employability. We will be introducing further optional Framework modules focusing on 'Service Learning' in 2023/24 (making a positive difference to local charities and volunteer-led community groups).

2.4.11 External investment

The development of our teaching 'ecosystem' has been supported by external funding. In April 2021 St Mary's won £363,000 of capital funding from the OfS to expand our Allied Health programmes. Key teaching spaces were updated and specialist teaching equipment was provided such as neurological rehabilitation equipment, and cardio-respiratory equipment. It also facilitated the establishment of a student 'clinic' to allow students the opportunity to practise their skills. A further £293,000 from HEE enabled the University to create a live digital simulation clinical facility. Combining both face to face and remote access live streaming using multi-functional cameras and a film management system, students are able to engage in two-way interactions with clinical patients. This funding also enabled St Mary's to broaden its use of simulation-based software – for example, in the use of digital simulated dissection tables. We have recently been awarded funding of £1.76 million by the OfS to develop and launch undergraduate and postgraduate computing science programmes in autumn 2023.

2.4.12 Supporting excellence via our Academic Workload Model

Excellence in teaching can only be developed, maintained and enhanced if management systems are in place to ensure that this is prioritised. The University's Academic Workload Model is designed to assure that academic staff have sufficient time to ensure excellence in teaching. Specific provisions include dedicated time for preparation of teaching, leadership of

modules/programmes, personal tutoring, VLE content development and new programme design, as well as activities like research, administration and committee work that informs teaching innovation and teaching-related policy development.

2.4.13 Our virtual learning environment

Our virtual learning environment (Moodle) is a key component of our learning & teaching ecosystem. All modules and programmes have a dedicated Moodle site which is a key learning and teaching 'interface' for students and a key mechanism by which students access content, communications and study support materials (e.g. a dedicated Moodle 'Study Skills' site accessible to all undergraduate students). The University will be investing over £340,000 in an upgrade to Moodle Version 4.1 in 2023, and a further £400,000 to create a new digital architecture to enable more effective integration of data between all of our platforms - basically a new, internal 'data super highway'. This new architecture will also support a new 'Student App' (a further £100,000 investment) to present a wider range of information to students via their mobile devices.

Focus for future enhancement

- Introduction of Programme Design Intensives (PDIs) in 2022/23
- Enhance the Personal Tutoring Policy & associated support/resources for Personal Tutors
- Implement Moodle upgrade and new digital architecture, including new 'Student App'

2.5 Providing support for students that enables them to succeed

2.5.1. In this section we explain how we maintain a supportive learning environment that enables students to access outstanding academic and non-academic support tailored to their needs.

2.5.2 The Hub & our Library

The Hub provides a single welcoming point of contact for all student queries. Launched in October 2021 it is designed to ensure that Students' issues or queries are answered or escalated rapidly without the need to go to multiple locations on campus. As part of the Hub project, the Library space was redesigned

The Hub has dealt with 8,447 student enquiries to date.

2.5.3 The University has invested in making our Library a more user-friendly and multi-functional resource for students. As well as housing the 'Hub' referred to above, new Library Officers now support Subject Librarians by promoting resources, inputting into Student-Staff Liaison Forums and assisting with the creation of supporting materials such as library guides and 'how to' videos. The benefits are already being realised. A suite of 29 Information Literacy sessions have attracted 1062 individual student views since September 2022. We are in the process of implementing a new Library Management System (LMS) which will improve student access to learning materials. The Library constantly refreshes its support pages on its website to ensure high quality online support complementing the in-person service the team provides to both students and staff.

2.5.4 Commuter Lounge

In response to student feedback, in 2018 St Mary's set about developing a dedicated space for our commuter students. A new 'Commuter Lounge' was opened in July 2019. This space contains a fully equipped kitchen, lockers, lounge area and is very well-utilised. One of our student ambassadors recently summed-up what we were aiming to achieve when she described it as follows: "It's like being at home without having to trek all the way home".

2.5.5 Student Services

Our Student Services team deliver a range of professional services and supports, guides and assists our students before, throughout and beyond their period of study. It provides seamless, holistic support to students on site in our Student Centre, and also virtually (online) to students whilst they are away from campus. The quality of support is outstanding. Our staff teams have been nominated for a variety of awards over the past four years including three National Student Housing awards for 'Best Moving-in Experience', 'Best Student Community' and 'Accommodation Hero'. The team have also received a practitioner's award for 'Continued Commitment to Aim Higher'. Regular user surveys ensure services are responsive to students' needs.

2.5.6 A wellbeing service and a disability service are available and experts from both teams work to support inclusive undergraduate pedagogical practices and the accessibility of our campus. The Disability & Dyslexia Service supports students with a range of learning differences, physical disabilities, chronic health conditions and enduring mental health conditions. Support includes on-site delivery of Educational Psychologists and Needs Assessment appointments and support for students needing to apply for Disabled Students Allowance (DSA). Internal data shows that over the past four years full-time students who have received disability and/or dyslexia support have been more likely to continue into a second year of study than students who do not access this support. The 'gap' between the withdrawal rates of students who have and have not accessed this support has never fallen below 3 percentage points over the past four years, and in 2019/20 it was as high as 10.8 percentage points. The average gap over the past four years was 6.9 percentage points in favour of those who have accessed support. Students who have received disability and/or dyslexia support have also been more likely to complete their studies.

2.5.7 The Mental Health and Counselling provision is available via booked appointments and daily 'drop-ins' so students are seen at the point of need or when in 'crisis'. This support is hugely valued as evidenced by student feedback: *"I had an excellent counselling experience. I felt an improvement week-by-week over the 4 weeks. I can't thank my counsellor enough.... She has helped me in every aspect of my life and it will help me to maintain this positive outlook as I go forward"*.

2.5.8 Receiving counselling support makes a tangible difference to continuation. Over the past four years the withdrawal figures for all undergraduate students who have received this specific counselling support have been 9.8, 9.9, 9.1 and 3.5 percentage points lower than for students who

have not received counselling or mental health support – the average gap being 8 percentage points. Again, students who have received counselling or mental health support have also been more likely to complete their studies. If one looks at the combined completion figures for students accessing either counselling or mental health support or the Dyslexia/Disability service, and compare these with students who have accessed neither, we find that the degree completion rate for the former for start years 2013/14, 2014/15, 2015/16 and 2016/17 was consistently higher from 2014/15 onwards with a positive 'gap' of 0.9 percentage points in this year, but larger gaps of 16.5 and 4.7 percentage points in the subsequent two start years.

2.5.9 Student Services is home to our Student Funding Service which provides students with support on issues like Student Finance England, Money Management, Financial Hardship and facilitates the 'St Mary's Cares' package (see para 2.5.11). The funding service is often a critical element in ensuring that a student can continue their studies: *"With this support some of the burdens and stress I was experiencing were relieved and I was able to focus on my studies. In addition to this the university also supported me in terms of on-site counselling, which, I found hugely supportive and inclusive"*. Our Hardship funding has a positive impact on those who qualify for it, both in terms of continuation and completion. In 2018/19 the withdrawal rate for students receiving Hardship funding was 18 percentage points lower than for those who did not receive it, and in the subsequent three years it was 13.2, 4.3 and 10.7 percentage points lower. Positive impacts can also be seen in relation to degree completion. The completion rate for students receiving hardship funds for start years 2013/14, 2014/5, 2015/16, and 2016/17 was 18.1, 14.3, 11.7 and 3.1 percentage points higher respectively.

2.5.10 The University also provides an 'Excellence Scholarship' of £3,000, an 'Annual Bursary' of £2,000 for students with an annual household income below £15,000, and a 'Student Engagement Fund' (established in 2021/22) helps students from low income households to access co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. In 2021/2022, 203 applications to the fund were received and 139 awards granted. The University has recently put in place additional support during the cost of living crisis, including an uplift to our Hardship Fund.

2.5.11 St Mary's Cares

The University's commitment to providing the greatest support where it is most needed is reflected in *St Mary's Cares* – a holistic package of support targeted at our care-experienced undergraduates and those 'estranged' from their families. In addition to a £3,000 annual bursary, the package includes accommodation for 365 days a year, additional pastoral care, support with mental wellbeing, a summer fund to assist with costs of living during vacations, priority access to Hardship Funds and the Laptop Loan Scheme, support with graduation costs, and a £1,000 'Graduation Award' for transition to employment. An independent evaluation by Specialist Evidence Evaluation & Research (SEER) states that *St Mary's Cares* *"evidences multiple elements of research-informed best practice"*^{vi}. The following feedback from students reflects the ethos of the initiative: *"The support has been amazing. I always feel as though St Mary's has gone above and beyond to make sure that I am ok. The little things that they do such as sending me a Christmas card makes the biggest difference"*. Withdrawal figures for students who have benefited from *St Mary's Cares* have, over the past 4 years, been between 6.8 and 11.1 percentage points lower than for students who have not been eligible for this support. *St Mary's Cares*, which is designed and delivered collaboratively between Student Services, Widening Participation and the students themselves, won the award for 'Outstanding Student Support' at the Times Higher Education Awards in November 2022.

2.6 Promoting, recognising and rewarding excellence in teaching

2.6.1 Building excellence through peer observation of teaching

'Team teaching' has always featured in our programmes with two or more lecturers often co-teaching the same class in the same classroom. The University has also encouraged sharing of practice through peer observation of teaching over the past 4 years. However, a more systematic approach has been set-out in our new Policy on Peer Observation of Teaching (approved 2022) that requires all our academic staff to annually engage in the process as observer and observed.

2.6.2 Rewarding excellence via promotions systems

For teaching to be properly valued its importance has to be recognised and acknowledged within reward and recognition systems. In 2019 the University introduced three promotion 'strands': i) Teaching & Scholarship, ii) Research and iii) Enterprise and Innovation. A further review resulted in the introduction of an additional fourth strand focused on 'Leadership', and in November 2022 the University approved the inclusion of a fifth strand focused on 'Professional Practice'. All staff seeking promotion must address three of the strands. Teaching must be one of the three. The 'Leadership' strand enables the University to reward the work of academic staff who lead enhancements in teaching and learning at either departmental, Faculty or University level.

2.6.3 Recognising and rewarding excellence via prizes and awards

The St Henry Walpole Prize is awarded to staff who innovate to enhance the student experience. Winners of the Prize have innovated in a number of areas, including simulated online work placements (see para 3.7.7) and 'Diversity Cafés' focusing on EDI issues. Walpole Prize winners and runners-up are invited to present at our annual Festival of Learning and Teaching. The University also supports staff applying for a *National Teaching Fellowship (NTF)* and *Collaborative Awards for Teaching Excellence (CATE)*. Staff who go the 'extra mile' to support students in their academic studies or the wider aspects of their experience at St Mary's (including 'behind the scenes' work) can be nominated for a Student Experience Award – two are awarded each year including one voted for by students.

2.6.4 Supporting excellence via high quality staff training

All new staff attend the University's staff induction programme and new academic staff with less than two years' experience of teaching complete the *Post-graduate Certificate in Academic Practice*. This ensures that they are equipped with both the knowledge, skills and insights necessary to be effective practitioners. The University provides an accredited professional recognition scheme that enables staff to achieve Associate Fellow, Fellow and Senior Fellow status. Almost half (49%) of staff hold HEA Fellowships, which is above the sector average of 46% in 2021/22. Staff training is also available in our partner institutions. Our annual Festival of Learning & Teaching has grown in scale over the past four years from 16 sessions in 2018 to 31 sessions in 2021. The University was commended by *AdvanceHE* in 2022 for "*clear institutional commitment to the professional development of staff that teach and support learning*"^{vii}. A more robust approach to impact evaluation is being developed so we can monitor the direct impact of staff training and mentoring on changes in staff practice and therefore on the student experience.

Focus for future enhancement

- Introduce a more robust approach to impact evaluation in relation to staff training

3. Student Outcomes

Over the past four years the University has put in place a range of initiatives, projects, resources and programmes to support positive student outcomes. These are summarised in this section.

3.1 Supporting positive student outcomes during the COVID pandemic

The University responded quickly and effectively to the challenges that the pandemic brought with it. It ensured that all necessary measures, safeguards and provisions were in place to ensure a COVID-compliant campus throughout the pandemic, and undertook rapid reviews of all regulations and assessments to ensure that students could continue their studies or complete their programmes with minimal disruption. Following consultation with the Students' Union, the University introduced a 'No Detriment' policy and a 'COVID Mitigation Package' in 2020. These minimised any negative impacts on students during the pandemic.

3.1.1 During the pandemic the University reached-out to its students via a series of online 'student experience' surveys in June and December 2020. These identified things that students liked or valued as well as 'problems' we might be able to help them with. The extensive work done by programme teams to adapt assessment and to share clear assessment information with students has paid dividends. The Dec 2020 survey (which had over 200 respondents) revealed very high positive ratings for statements like *'I know where to find the information I need for my assessments'* (88% agreed or strongly agreed) and *'I am able to access key learning resources for my assignments'* (81% agreed or strongly agreed). The student surveys helped us to respond quickly to identified needs. Many students said they were struggling with poor computing equipment at home or in their residences, and frequently reported poor quality broadband. The University responded by investing in a 'Long-Term Equipment Loan Scheme', and a large number of equipment bundles that included high-quality Wi-Fi-enabled laptops and 4G Wi-Fi dongles. The scheme went 'live' in October 2020. 145 students have benefited from it. Our Digital Equality Scheme ensures that all our students have access to suitable technology to support their learning.

3.1.2 St Mary's was awarded additional funds from the OfS in 2020 to support those experiencing pandemic-related financial hardship. Receipt of this funding made a material difference to eligible students in terms of their continuation (see **Table 3**). The percentage of students who withdrew in 2020/21 within the wider population of undergraduate students was 10.7%, whereas the withdrawal rate for students who received this funding was only 5.4%.

Status	Successful	Headcount	Withdrawn	Headcount
Funds Accessed	94.6%	264	5.4%	15
Not Accessed	89.3%	3206	10.7%	385
All Undergraduates	89.7%	3470	10.3%	400

Table 3

Differences in withdrawal rates for students who did and did not access the COVID Student Support Fund.

3.2 Student continuation metrics

3.2.1 The University's continuation figures on the B3 Conditions Data Dashboard shows that St Mary's comfortably exceeds the B3 continuation thresholds for undergraduate programmes. Our continuation metric for 'First degree' programmes is 84.8% compared to a threshold of 80%. The continuation metric for 'Other UG' programmes of 76.6% exceeds the B3 threshold of 75%.

However, we are not complacent and continuation remains a key priority for all areas of the university as outlined below.

3.2.2 Continuation (Full-time)

The OfS TEF Data Dashboard shows that our overall indicator on continuation is 84.1% compared to benchmark of 89.1% - a 5 percentage point gap. The University's metric on this measure has been declining rather than improving against benchmark over a four-year period. A negative gap of 1.4% points in the earliest recorded year has grown to 12.7% in the most recent year. The gap varies between 'First degree' programmes (which account for 94% of all of our UG students) and 'Other UG' students (which account for 6% of our UG students). The negative gap in the case of the latter is 6.5 percentage points, whereas the gap in the case of the former is 4.8 percentage points. The continuation gap between our performance and benchmark is smaller for mature students than for young students. If one looks at the continuation metric in relation to ethnicity of students, there are negative gaps between the University's performance and benchmark for all ethnic groups. The smallest negative gap is for white students – the figure of 88.3% is 1.7 percentage points below benchmark of 90%. The largest negative gap relates to 'Other' (6.8 percentage points) and then 'Asian' students (6.2 percentage points) and 'Black' students (5.7 percentage points). This suggests that the University is close to achieving benchmark in relation to the continuation of White students but is struggling to reach the continuation benchmark for BAME students. Only one subject area (History) has a continuation figure for full-time students that exceeds the benchmark. The largest negative gap is in Business (12.8% percentage points). The most notable difference is between the continuation of Home students and International students. In the case of the former, the University's continuation figure of 85.8% is 3.2 percentage points below benchmark, but the figure for the latter of 68.8% falls 21 percentage points below benchmark. We will be putting in place significant additional support for our international students to address this gap over the next four years, and have already invested in the recruitment of additional Learning Development Lecturers, Learning Tutors (who support language development for students who have English as a second language) and Pastoral Support Tutors who will provide enhanced support for our international students. A three-year university-level Student Retention Strategy is currently in development and will address weak continuation metrics for specific student groups (e.g. BAME students, international students) and programmes via targeted interventions and enhanced support. An early example of our approach is reflected in an ambitious new '*January Reconnect*' programme (23-27 January 2023) that provides a range of social, academic and sporting activities aimed at building 'a sense of belonging' and mental wellbeing.

3.2.3 Continuation (Part-time)

Part-time students' continuation rates are stronger than their full-time peers. There are only 220 students in the part-time student cohort, and the negative 'gap' between our indicator score and the benchmark is much smaller at 1.5% compared to a negative 5 percentage point gap for full-time students. Continuation figures for part-time students have fallen behind benchmark in two of the snapshot years with negative percentage point gaps of 1.7 and 6.4. However, in Year 2 the University's part-time continuation figure was 6.9 percentage points above benchmark. The continuation figure for part-time 'First degree' students is again significantly higher than for 'Other UG'. The proportion of White part-time students continuing is comparable with benchmark.

Focus for future enhancement

- Implement improvements which ensure a more inclusive learning environment that impacts positively on continuation for 'Other UG', 'BAME' students and 'International' students

3.3 Student completion metrics

3.3.1 The OfS B3 Data Dashboard shows that our completion figure of 83.0% for 'First degree' students exceeds the B3 threshold of 75%. However, for 'Other UG' programmes the University's figure of 62.1% falls below the B3 threshold of 65%. It is important to note, however, that whilst the 'First degree' figure relates to 4,790 students, the 'Other UG' metric relates to a relatively small cohort of 310 students (6.0% of our student body). The University has set itself ambitious targets for completion of undergraduate full-time students over the next five years which would result in a 4.5 percentage point improvement by 2026/27. The target of 88.0% completion would be well above the overall indicator benchmark figure (at present) of 86.2%. The University has also set a target of 65% completion for 'Other UG' students by 2022/23 (which would be compliant with the B3 threshold) and a target of 73% over the next five years.

3.3.2 *Student completion: Full-time*

Our institutional overall indicator for completion is 81.7% compared to benchmark of 86.2%. The University's completion figure has remained below benchmark for the four years included in the OfS TEF Dashboard, although the trend is that of reduction in the size of the 'gap' between our own completion figure and benchmark, reducing from a high of 6.0 percentage points in Year 2, to 3.7 percentage points in Year 4 (the most recent year). As seen in relation to the continuation metric, there is again a significant difference in completion between 'First degree' and 'Other UG' students. The gap between our own metric and benchmark for completion is 10.7 percentage points for 'Other UG' and only 4.1 percentage points for 'First Degree'. Completion for all age groups falls below benchmark, as does that for all ethnic groups, with the smallest gap being that for 'White' students at 3.5 percentage points, and the biggest gap relating to 'Other' at 10.7 percentage points. If one sets aside 'Other' students, the biggest disparity in terms of completion at St Mary's is between White students (84.2%) and Black students (73.1%), an issue addressed within our Access & Participation Plan. There is a difference in completion between male and female undergraduate students at St Mary's, with the completion figure for males (75.3%) falling significantly behind females (87.1%). We will increase support and also the use of peer mentoring in programmes with low completion rates, and those where males are strongly represented.

3.3.3 *Student completion: Part-time*

Completion levels for part-time students are stronger than those for full-time students. The overall indicator for St Mary's on this metric is 81.0% compared to benchmark of 69.5%. There is an improving trajectory over the past 4 years, with completion amongst our part-time students increasing from 78.6% to 87.7%. The difference in completion between male and female part-time students is much smaller than that for full-time students.

Focus for future enhancement

- Implement enhancements that improve completion for 'Other UG', 'Black' students generally and 'Male' students in SAHPS especially.

3.4 Student progression metrics

3.4.1 The University's progression metric in the OfS Dashboard for full-time 'First degree' students is 70.5%. This exceeds the B3 threshold of 60% and the benchmark of 68.6%. The progression figure for 'Other UG' is 77.2% compared to a B3 threshold of 45% and benchmark of 64.9%. The University is performing well in terms of graduates progressing into professional level employment, but with an aspiration to achieve an alignment with London averages.

3.4.2 *Student progression: Full-time*

The TEF Dashboard data for progression shows that St Mary's is achieving outstanding levels of progression for our undergraduate students. Our overall indicator figure for progression is 71.0% compared to a benchmark of 68.3%. If one considers over a four-year period the splits for Home/International, Male/Female, polar figures, and age groups, the University's metric exceeds benchmark in all areas. We are materially above benchmark in no less than 15 of the 'split' categories. However, we are also aware that there is scope for improvement in specific areas where our figure falls very slightly below benchmark. One example relates to Black students, whose progression figure is 59.6% compared to a benchmark of 60.3%, and Polar Quintile 1&2, students where our metric of 63.3% falls slightly below the benchmark of 64.1% (a gap of only 0.8 percentage points). There are also some subject areas where progression falls below benchmark. These include Allied Health, Sociology and Law. We will be putting in place three-year action plans for each of these programmes to ensure progression to graduate level employment is improved.

3.4.3 *Student progression: Part-time*

The progression picture for part-time students is very similar to that for their full-time peers, in the sense that the University's progression figures normally exceed benchmark, and where they do not (in only two cases) the negative gap is a small one. The two exceptions are ABCS Quintiles 4&5, and Deprivation Quintiles 3, 4 & 5, where the gap is 0.6 percentage points and 3.2 percentage points respectively. All subject areas included in the Dashboard comfortably exceed benchmark. For part-time First Degree students our figure of 87.3% is far higher than the benchmark of 80.1%.

Focus for future enhancement

- Implement 3-year improvement action plans for programmes where metrics for progression into graduate level employment falls below sector benchmark.

3.5 Support and initiatives focused on supporting continuation and completion

3.5.1 Supporting students 'at risk'

Our *Students at Risk Procedure* was introduced in 2019/20 and has been updated each year since. For 2022/23 a raft of improvements have been implemented including incorporating clearer guidance in the Procedure itself, improved training and improved recording of information by programme teams. Our systems for recording student attendance at online sessions should be more user-friendly for staff to utilise, however, and this will be addressed via the implementation of a 'state of the art' 'Student App' from 2023 (see para 2.4.13 above).

3.5.2 'Wobble Week'

Wobble Week is a retention-focused programme that ran for the first time at St Mary's from the 8th-12th November 2021. Designed to support students a few weeks into their first term, at a point when many experience 'wobbles', it includes wellbeing activities, pastoral support, social, and sporting events coordinated by Sport St Mary's, events contributed by students and staff and a mixture of face-to-face, online, daytime, and evening activities. It is a collaboration between staff, the Students' Union, and student-led societies. Around 300 students engaged directly in Wobble Week in 2021. In the spirit of co-creation the 2021 Wobble Week participants and members of our Student Experts Panel helped to design Wobble Week 2022. Feedback from participants on Wobble Week has been very positive:

- "Great to see that the feelings that many experience (usually on their own) were normalised. It made me feel that it was okay and that I was not alone... Thank you!"

- *"I personally found it really helpful, even just hearing about others' experiences and what wobbles people face. It really was good to know you're not alone."*

3.5.3 Get Set for Success (GSFS)

This ran for the tenth year in September 2022. It is an outstanding two-day pre-induction initiative that enhances an early sense of 'belonging' in new students from WP backgrounds. It takes place 1-2 weeks ahead of main induction/Freshers' Week. The programme features guest speakers, academic support, interactive workshops, social activities, mentoring, team-working exercises, and meetings with academic programme teams. It is a cross-university effort led by our WP team but with inputs from central services, academic faculties, the Students' Union, student ambassadors, and Brightside Trust who offer pre-arrival mentoring. The 2021 programme evaluation showed the proportion of students who felt well prepared to engage with their University studies rose from 62.5% (before GSFS) to 93.1% (after GSFS). GSFS was shortlisted in the 'Best Widening Participation or Outreach Initiative' at the Times Higher Education Awards in November 2022.

3.5.4 Lecture Capture & Zoom

Lecture Capture (Panopto) was rolled-out in January 2020 in all teaching spaces. An institutional subscription to Zoom was secured soon after, supported by Zoom training. These enabled staff to build content and pedagogy that maximised opportunities for student learning, as evidenced by feedback from our students: *"I have appreciated the online learning possibility enormously. It has meant that, for the first time ever in my life, I have been able to help out family who live very far from the university campus, whilst continuing my studies.... Despite having missed the first weeks, I was able to catch up on materials online. The teaching has been and is excellent ... I cannot think of anything that could be improved"* [COVID Student Experience Survey, Dec 2020].

Focus for future enhancement

- Implement new 'Student App' to facilitate recording & monitoring of attendance

3.6 Initiatives focused on supporting student progression

3.6.1 BeSMART & Employability Confident

BeSMART is a tailored intervention for BAME students to enhance their access to and ability to undertake highly skilled work experience placements. This can include mentoring, internships and shadowing experiences. Coordinated jointly between the widening participation team and staff in Employability Services, it ran for the first time in 2019. Evaluations have shown that it has been effective in developing self-management, professionalism, communication skills, and career management skills. Roughly a quarter of the participants in 2021 said that they had already secured a job, and a further two-fifths confirmed that they had developed a career plan and would be seeking relevant work experience. Feedback from employers has been outstanding:

- *"I would highly recommend BeSMART. It has been a great opportunity for the interns to gain practical skills and learn about working in a corporate environment... My interns were great to work with.... and delivered meaningful projects..."* Senior Director, Gartner.
- *"This is a great programme which provides much needed experience for BAME students in the workplace... This experience provided students with real working knowledge of office life... [including] 'softer' skills – for example, confidence and capacity building".* Manager, Emperor.

BeSMART was shortlisted at the National Undergraduate Employability Awards in 2021 in the 'Best Widening Participation' category. Its success led to the development of 'Employability Confident' at St Mary's, a parallel scheme for students with registered disabilities.

3.6.2 Linked-In Learning

In 2019 the University developed a new partnership with *LinkedIn Learning* as a means of rapidly extending staff & student access to free online content and over 16,000 courses. However, we would like to see student-usage increase and LinkedIn content to be more effectively embedded into the routine delivery of programmes. The University will be establishing a 'LinkedIn Learning Action Group' in 2022/23 tasked with exploring how both student engagement and the impact the platform has on developing the career-readiness of our students can be enhanced.

Focus for future enhancement

- Examine impact of LinkedIn Learning content in enhancing career-readiness of students.

3.7 Curriculum developments supporting student progression

3.7.1 Our Employability Strategy: a holistic and embedded approach

Employability involves the development of knowledge, skills and personal attributes that enable a student to secure a graduate job and manage and evolve their career in an ever-changing job market. To enable our students to navigate the changing world of work requires a holistic approach encompassing the academic, extracurricular and social and professional development elements of the student experience. This is articulated in our Employability Strategy which was approved in 2019, and is now being reviewed and updated. The Employability Strategy links explicitly to the 'graduate attributes' and 'graduate qualities' set-out in our Curriculum Framework (see para 2.4.9). Central to the Strategy is an 'embedded' approach in which our Employability Services (ES) staff are fully integrated members of programme teams, working hand-in-hand with our academics and embedding employability within subject content and assessment. One of the distinctive features of our Strategy at St Mary's is that students can opt to gain experience of 'applied learning' (see paras 3.7.4 – 3.7.8) in varied workplace settings alongside their academic studies. This ensures that they gain valuable insights into the modern workplace whilst also developing concrete employability skills and the attitudes/behaviours that will serve them well in securing graduate level jobs and being successful in them. The pandemic prompted our ES team to work even more closely with employers to identify virtual and innovative ways for students to gain workplace experience. An example is our Simulated Work Placement module (see para 3.7.7). This, alongside our range of flexible internships, has created myriad opportunities for students to develop the skills needed for employment via applied learning.

3.7.2 Programmes regulated by Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs).

As of October 2022, 32 of our programmes at St Mary's were subject to accreditation and/or regulatory oversight by a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (PSRB). In programmes of this kind the approval process requires full compliance with the relevant PSRB requirements, including professional placements and 'applied' learning of one kind or another. In many cases, students who complete part or the whole of their academic programme are eligible for 'professional qualifications' that sit alongside their academic qualification. On the BSc Psychology programme students gain Chartered Membership of the BPS (GBC) if they achieve a pass in the empirical psychology project component of the programme and a minimum of 2:2 overall. Students who pass key modules on the BSc Management and Entrepreneurship are awarded the Level 5 Diploma in Leadership and Management by the Chartered Institute of Management. The external examiner for our BSc Sports Performance Analysis and Talent Identification (an accelerated two-year BSc award) has commented that *"The practical and applied experiences of the programme staff adds huge value to the programme... Encouraging students to apply for International Society of Performance Analysis of Sport (SPAS accreditation) L1 status upon completion of the programme*

is a strength". The external for our BSc Sport & Exercise Science (endorsed by the British Association of Sport and Exercise Scientists) has also commented that *"The course is very applied and the students find this very engaging. The students come out with good skills for employability which is vitally important..."*.

3.7.3 Two of our undergraduate programmes – the BA Primary Education with QTS and the BA Primary Education with QTS (Work Based Route) – are subject to quality inspections by Ofsted. Both programmes sit within our Institute of Education (established in 2018 following a wider restructuring). The Institute's ITE partnerships cover 450 primary schools and over 150 secondary schools. The most recent Ofsted inspection report from 2018 rated our ITE provision as a whole as 'outstanding' for all elements. It states that: *"Leaders ensure that St Mary's University's ethos and values of inclusivity, generosity of spirit, respect and excellence underpin their work with trainees. They prioritise trainees' well-being, which ensures that trainees and newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are exceptionally well cared for and valued by the partnership. As a result, trainees have high expectations of themselves and achieve outstanding outcomes. A special feature of St Mary's is the bespoke support given to students during and after they gain qualified teacher status"*^{viii}.

3.7.4 Year in placement programmes

In September 2021 St Mary's approved 19 'Year in Placement' Degree programmes. Eleven of these were launched in September 2022 and encompass the arts, humanities, social sciences, business and sport-related programmes. The Placement Year is embedded and integral to students' studies. Placements are generally paid (or attract a loan), reducing financial concerns for students from less privileged backgrounds. Year in Placement programmes provide new opportunities for students to gain experience of applied learning, whilst developing skills, commercial awareness, and a strong professional identity. One published study^{ix} notes that *"the BME achievement gap was markedly smaller in students who had taken a Placement Year. [The] placement experience is associated with reduced achievement gaps – for both BME students and for students entering University with different levels of prior achievement. Placement experience may therefore offer a mechanism to help bridge the BME achievement gap...."* St Mary's aims to grow the number of students on Year in Placement programmes over the next four years.

3.7.5 Work-based learning modules

Employability Services includes our Centre for Workplace Learning (CWL) through which a team of academics teach a bespoke suite of professional skills modules at L5, L6 and L7. An integrated part of CWL modules is a short-term work placement, supported by dedicated Placements Officers. Over 1,300 students have completed CWL modules over the past 4 years, and over 700 in the past two years alone. During the COVID pandemic the team quickly adapted placements and assessments including creating a highly innovative Simulated Work Placement (see para 3.7.7), thus enabling students to continue to engage effectively and complete their modules successfully. One of our external examiners commented in 2020/21 that *"CWL's modules continue to chime with the demands of the HE sector and I am confident that St Mary's students will benefit in their employability from taking one (or more) of CWL's modules. The range of CWL modules continue to address and exemplify QAA standards around employability, entrepreneurship and enterprise"*. A second commented in their report on the CWL modules that: *"Assessments continue to be innovative and creative, giving students real exposure to a range of challenges - both academic and experiential. Support around assessments remains exemplary. There continues to be an excellent range of written, audio and video assessment. I have been impressed over my 4 years with the design and structure of the assessments and also, importantly, the standard of*

marking and the quality of feedback given.” Feedback from students has also been extremely positive. For example: *“I absolutely loved this module, despite the content seeming very daunting in the beginning (Lectures + Virtual Organisation + Real Life WPL). However, in hindsight specifically the structure and consistency of the module was probably the greatest structure throughout my whole degree”*. Another student said: *“it has provided me with skills of leadership to apply in my future workplace. Prior to this module, I had a lack of experience within a working environment and this module has allowed me to work in the sector and develop my knowledge”*. We will be introducing new ‘Service Learning’ CWL modules in 2023/24 which will also be optional modules within our Curriculum Framework (see para 2.4.9).

3.7.6 Placements & placement awards

St Mary's offers students a large number of placement opportunities as part of accredited learning for a degree, experiential academic modules, or CWL work-based learning modules, giving students access to a wide range of employers. Over the past four years, placements officers have worked with between 140 and 220 different employers each year to secure placements, and 1,007 students have completed one. In addition, during the COVID-impacted years (2020/21 & 2021/22), a further 115 students completed Simulated Work Placements (see para 3.7.7). Placements are so central to our student experience that we established an awards scheme to recognise outstanding placement students and superb placement providers.

3.7.7 Simulated Work Placements (SWP)

The Simulated Work Placement (SWP) was initially created in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure students could continue to gain valuable work experience despite placement restrictions. The SWP has been a great success, shown by the fact that it is now an integral part of our offering and is a popular placement choice for St Mary's students. The SWP ensures students have a curated, academically rigorous experience of simulated work activities. It mirrors, as closely as possible, a real-life placement. Students work remotely to develop their professional skills whilst adhering to weekly task deadlines set by their ‘virtual boss’. Additionally, some tasks involve live briefs given by our organisational partners so the students experience the type of projects which they might undertake in future graduate roles. 200 students have taken the SWP since the start of the pandemic. The SWP won the St Henry Walpole Prize in 2021 because of its ‘well-evidenced benefits to the student experience’. More than 20 different employers have provided real-life projects for our SWP students including MacAlpine Care, Mind, Fujitsu and Chelsea FC.

3.7.8 Student internships

Employability Services is succeeding in engaging with employers to establish a range of paid internships. Over the past three years, 116 summer internships have been funded by employers, and 98 BeSMART and Employability Confident paid internships have also been funded from our widening participation budget. These provide our undergraduates with valuable opportunities to gain ‘real world’ work experience and to gain insights into the kinds of career options open to them. Work Placement Awards recognise outstanding internship providers and students.

3.7.9 Embedded programme level employability initiatives

Our embedded approach to employability means that the development of employability skills is integrated into programmes, even where there are no mandatory placements. Examples include:

- UG Creative Media – The programme enables students to gain ‘real world’ experience by recording content at our *Festival of Learning and Teaching* over the past 4 years.
- UG Law –Students gain experience in the local Law Centre and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

- UG Acting – *Project 10* prepares students for progression into the creative industries. Students work with casting directors, agents, producers to develop their CV, headshots, voice tapes and show reels. Project 10 is so called because, by the end, students have 10 theatre professionals they will be able to contact and request professional support from once they graduate.
- UG Physiotherapy – The programme team supported the undergraduate students to set up a student-led Physiotherapy clinic called 'SPACE'. The students take the lead on advertising, marketing and delivery of physiotherapy services to the local community.

3.7.10 A number of our programmes involve collaborative working with students from other universities. Examples include:

- UG Nutrition – Has established a collaboration with Royal Holloway, London. Their undergraduate archaeology students come to meet St Mary's Nutrition students in the nutrition kitchen in February each year to cook and taste Roman foods.
- UG Sports Rehabilitation – The programme team delivers parts of a module in collaboration with Winona State University, Minnesota, US. Students are separated into mixed breakout rooms and required to critically review presentations by external sector experts.

3.7.11 A number of our programmes actively engage in fund-raising for local charities, or run services that benefit the local community whilst helping students to apply knowledge and skills:

- UG Chelsea Football Coaching Foundation – Students set up a free after school girls football coaching programme, thereby developing skills whilst 'give something back' to the community. The external examiner commented: *"The programme continues to benefit from being embedded with a strong vocational strand, and it's good to see students afforded opportunities to coach both within the curriculum and in the local community/elite youth settings..."*.
- UG Sport Rehabilitation – students have provided support services for a number of high-profile events such as The London Marathon, Hampton Court Half Marathon and GB Rugby 7s Series.

3.7.12 Many of our undergraduate programmes also draw on external experts or 'guest lecturers' from the sector/industry concerned, or draw on alumni who have progressed to professional roles.

3.8 Employability Services

3.8.1 Employability Services provides diverse forms of support to undergraduate students:

- 1 to 1 appointments, 'practice' interviews and in-depth 1-hour career discussions.
- Embedded 'careers in curriculum' sessions in lectures/seminars.
- Career Fairs, 'Employer on Campus' events, a Volunteering Fair and summer internships.
- The 'St Mary's Award' incentivising students to actively engage in career development activities.
- Centre for Workplace Learning which provides placement modules & placements support team.
- 'Start-Up St Mary's' enables students with a business idea to develop it and win funding.
- Online Careers resources e.g. help-sheets, guides and interactive online learning for students.
- A Jobs & Vacancies Board, Psychometric test packages & training in assessment centre tasks.

3.8.2 One-to-one support

Supporting the progression of our students goes beyond arranging 'events' like Careers Fairs and initiatives like *BeSMART*. It is also about supporting each student by providing personalised guidance and support in 1 to 1 sessions. Over the last four years, the number of these attended by students has never fallen below 1,393, and in the last two years has been 1,818 and 1,600.

3.9 Graduate Outcomes Surveys

3.9.1 Progression into general employment or further study

Table 4 shows our performance in relation to student progression into general employment or further study for cohorts in 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20^x. St Mary's outperformed London Universities and the rest of the higher education sector in all three years for both full-time 'First Degree' and Foundation Degree students. The gap between St Mary's and the wider sector for 'All undergraduate' students was 0.7 percentage points in 2017/18, 1.2 in 2018/19 and 3.4 in 2019/20, indicating that St Mary's has, in fact, continued to extend its lead in this area.

3.9.2 St Mary's ranks 2nd among London universities and 4th nationally for the percentage of UK-domiciled graduates (studying at all levels) in employment and/or further study 15 months after completion and ranks 1st in London and 10th nationally for UK-domiciled full-time First Degree graduates in employment and/or further study 15 months after completion. Unemployment rates for our graduates are very low indeed, and significantly lower than most comparable institutions.

	2017/18			2018/19			2019/20			All Years		
Programme	St Mary's	Sector	London	St Mary's	Sector	London	St Mary's	Sector	London	St Mary's	Sector	London
FDN Degree	91.8%	85.8%	83.6%	90.2%	83.2%	80.4%	95.7%	84.8%	84.1%	92.3%	84.6%	82.7%
First Degree	90.0%	89.8%	87.6%	88.5%	87.9%	84.1%	92.8%	90.1%	86.9%	90.2%	89.2%	86.2%
All UG	90.2%	89.5%	87.4%	88.8%	87.6%	83.9%	93.2%	89.8%	86.8%	90.5%	89.0%	86.0%

Source - HESA (HEIDI+) Graduate Outcomes

Table 4

Graduate outcomes survey; Percentage of full-time UK-domiciled graduates in employment and/or further study 15 months after completion of studies

3.9.3 Progression into highly skilled (graduate) jobs or further study

The progression data in the OfS TEF Dashboard shows that St Mary's is achieving outstanding levels of progression that are well above benchmark. However, we are ambitious for our students and aspire to also meet the average figure for progression into graduate level roles for the sector, and also London universities. This is why we now routinely compare our performance to both in the Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS). Over the past three surveys (for cohorts graduating in 2017/18, 2018/19, 2019/20), GOS data (see **Table 5**) shows that the University has made significant progress in achieving this objective. The negative 'gap' between St Mary's performance and that of the sector has narrowed from 4.7 percentage points to 2.3 in this period. The negative gap between St Mary's and London universities has also narrowed from 4.2 percentage points to only 2.8. Our aim is to eradicate both of these small remaining gaps over the next four years.

	2017/18			2018/19			2019/20			All Years		
Programme	St Mary's	Sector	London	St Mary's	Sector	London	St Mary's	Sector	London	St Mary's	Sector	London
FDN	66.3%	54.9%	60.5%	72.8%	55.7%	64.3%	70.5%	54.1%	58.5%	69.9%	54.9%	61.2%
First Degree	62.8%	70.1%	69.2%	58.9%	67.5%	68.4%	60.5%	68.5%	67.7%	60.7%	68.7%	68.1%
All UG	64.5%	69.2%	68.7%	65.9%	66.9%	68.2%	65.5%	67.8%	67.3%	65.3%	68.0%	68.1%

Source - HESA (HEIDI+) Graduate Outcomes

Table 5

Graduate Outcomes Survey; UK-domiciled graduates employed in highly skilled (graduate) jobs 15 months after completion of studies.

3.9.4 The University recognises that while very successful in enabling our students to progress into paid employment, the data in **Table 5** above shows that there is scope for improvement in terms of progression into graduate roles. Alongside an ongoing revision of our *Employability Strategy*, over the next four years the University will take a holistic, data-informed approach to improving student outcomes. We will build an approach that will be integrated into the curriculum, cross-institutional, and sustainable in terms of infrastructure. We will use data from the Graduate Outcomes Survey and internal career readiness data to scope the range of factors contributing to graduates entering non-graduate roles. We will also draw on our 'progression-focused' dimension of Educational Gain we call 'Work Readiness and Employment' (see section 3.10 below). This targeted approach will enable us to improve our students' career readiness. Using our recently acquired career readiness data (which we have collected for the past two years) that indicates students' level of career planning – a reliable indicator of graduate/non-graduate level outcomes – we will work to identify correlations between students' stages of career readiness and their progression.

3.9.5 Employability Services and academic leads will collaborate to identify initiatives that will enable students to articulate clearly the skills and attributes that they are gaining from their modules and placement activities, in order to apply more effectively for graduate level roles. We will focus on ensuring that all students have access to this integrated, institution-wide framework. This will support all our graduates in making the transition to graduate level employment or further study/training (e.g. progression to PGCEs). We will further develop support for those graduates interested in freelance employment, relevant to many of our subject areas (e.g. drama, sport). We will continue to partner with our longstanding collaborators in industry and the local community, and expand the access our students have to experiential learning via workplace experience at graduate level locally, in order to progress their career readiness. We will continue our personalised graduate calling campaign, ensuring the continuation of bespoke support that St Mary's is renowned for.

3.9.6 Examples of specific initiatives include:

- Growing experiential learning opportunities – we will significantly increase the percentage of students taking up placement and service learning opportunities.
- Growing our Skills Award - we will draw on lessons learned from small scale 'pilots' of our St Mary's Skills Award to rapidly grow the number of students who engage with it.
- Growing mentoring opportunities - we will interrogate the data for cohorts with poorer graduate outcomes and set up bespoke interventions, including mentoring schemes.

3.10 Educational gain

3.10.1 St Mary's Model of Educational Gain

Vision 2030 aims to give students a transformational experience, 'seeking to develop the whole person and empower our community to have a positive impact on the world.' This emphasis on the 'whole person' means that educational gain also needs to be seen as multi-dimensional. We also recognise from previous HEFCE-funded projects that there is no simple definition or measure of educational gain. Our model of Educational Gain will therefore embrace three distinct dimensions: i) academic development, ii) personal development and iii) work readiness and employability. All interact and contribute to the educational gain our students can expect (See **Figure 6** overleaf).

3.10.2 Academic Development (Value Added)

The Guardian league table's 'Value Added' measure scores universities on the likelihood of First Degree entrants going on to receive Good Honours (based on entry qualifications and age) and is a measure of their academic gain, as well as reflecting "*how effectively students are taught*". St Mary's performs exceptionally (and consistently) well. For the past 4 years no more than 24 institutions have returned a higher Value Added' score than St Mary's. St Mary's 'Value Added' scores reflect that, despite being a low entry tariff university with average tariff points of 116 for new entrants in 2020/21 (well below sector and London averages), the University outperforms many comparable institutions in Good Honours awards. In 2020/21, for example, 81.6% of St Mary's 'First Degree' graduates received Good Honours, just below the sector average of 81.9%^{xi}. We believe our success in adding value to our students and supporting their academic development is the result of the supportive, nurturing learning community we have developed, scaffolded by our Curriculum Framework, our approach to learning and teaching, and other initiatives described in this submission. Although we cannot precisely replicate this external measure, where possible we intend to draw on the data available to us to replicate as closely as possible the Guardian's methodology in monitoring the academic development of our future student intakes.

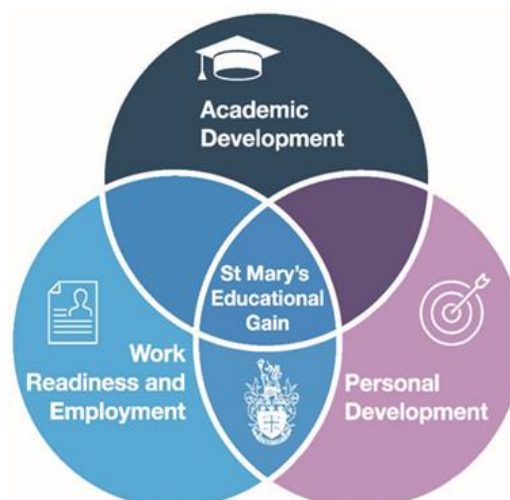


Figure 6

Visual summary of our tripartite dimensions of Educational Gain.

3.10.3 Personal Development

Our vision is to support every student to recognise and achieve their potential, and this includes developing the 'whole person', including the 'graduate attributes' and 'graduate qualities' contained in our Curriculum Framework (see para 2.4.9 above). As part of the next stage in the development of our Employability Strategy we will be rapidly increasing student engagement in our 'St Mary's Award' (an internal skills award piloted previously on a small scale) and drawing on student achievement evidenced in our annual 'Student Engagement Awards', and evidence of student engagement with Sport St Mary's, to provide concrete data that can inform our measure of personal development in the future. One of the strengths of the St Mary's Award is that when claiming their award, students are required to reflect on which attributes and qualities they have demonstrated and the evidence that supports this, and these are checked by staff, thereby ensuring a robust evidence trail and verifiable data.

3.10.4 Work Readiness and Employment

Our third dimension of educational gain focuses on the journey that our students undertake whilst they are with us in relation to developing their career readiness, and their subsequent ability to transition successfully into employment. In the Graduate Outcomes Survey, St Mary's graduates consistently outperform their peers in terms of being employed or in further study (see section 3.9). A high proportion are in public/third sector roles, and compared to the sector, a higher proportion agree that they are utilising their degree knowledge and find their activities meaningful. We will build on this success by adopting a 'structurally unavoidable' approach in which employability design is integrated into curriculum content, teaching and personal tutoring and by further extending the range of 'applied learning' opportunities available to our students through

placements, CWL modules, internships, service learning modules, volunteering and other forms of practical learning that build work readiness. We will also continue to target interventions at cohorts of students where employability outcomes are below benchmark, including our nationally recognised *BeSMART* and *Employability Confident* programmes (see para 3.6.1). We will then measure work readiness at specific touch points during the student journey, including via a career readiness survey completed by students during initial enrolment (repeated annually at each subsequent stage of study), and via institution-specific questions we include in our NSS surveys in the final year of study.

3.11 Student input into our TEF submission

3.11.1 We have worked closely with our Students' Union to ensure that the principle of 'co-creation' and partnership has informed the development of our TEF submission. Our Students' Union Education President has been a member of our TEF Working Group and members of our 'Student Experts Panel' have provided helpful feedback on the submission. We are delighted that our Students' Union have chosen to submit their own separate submission for TEF 2023.

4. Summary

4.1 In this TEF submission we believe that the evidence presented is consistent with an outstanding student experience, and in particular outstanding teaching, student support and student engagement as set out in Annexe A 'Features of Excellence (SE1-SE7) in Regulatory Advice 22. We also believe that the rate at which our students progress into professional or managerial employment or further study is outstanding (SO1; SO3). However, we recognise that there is scope to improve continuation and completion rates in some areas, and sound strategies are in place or being developed to address these, as described above.

5. References

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- ⁱ St Mary's, *Vision 2030*.
 - ⁱⁱ St Mary's, *Learning & Teaching Strategy 2020/21-2025/26*.
 - ⁱⁱⁱ St Mary's *Assessment Policy*
 - ^{iv} St Mary's *Assessment Descriptors (Marking Scales)*
 - ^v World Economic Forum, *These are the top 10 job skills of tomorrow – and how long it takes to learn them* (October, 2020)
 - ^{vi} (March 2021), *Case Study Report, Support for Care-Experienced Students, St Mary's University, SEER*.
 - ^{vii} *AdvanceHE*, Reaccreditation submission feedback letter, May 2022.
 - ^{viii} Ofsted, *St Mary's University ITE Partnership* (Dec 2018)
 - ^{ix} Moores E., et al, (Sep, 2017) '*Placement Work Experience May Mitigate Lower Achievement Levels of Black and Asian vs. White Students at University*', *Frontiers in Psychology*, Vol 8.
 - ^x HESA, *Graduate Outcomes Survey 2019/20*.
 - ^{xi} St Mary's, *Degree Outcomes Statement* (Dec 2022)