

1. Introduction

In this narrative we will first provide insights into who we are - our reputation, our location, our students, as well as our mission and culture: these provide important context for the things we do and what motivates us. The main body of the submission is **framed around the aspects of excellence, mapped to the thirteen quality features**, using brackets. You will therefore see main headings of:

- Academic Experience and Assessment
- Resources, Support and Student Engagement
- Positive Outcomes and Educational Gains

These are supplemented by sub-headings to aid navigation. This matters because, whilst disaggregating what we do to address the criteria, we believe that these things are inextricably linked. All elements of our Student Experience are **deliberately designed to deliver Positive Outcomes** for students, whatever their starting point. Our model is **holistic**: where every colleague and every input, academic or support, is focused on delivering excellence. This is one of several themes you will see throughout, including:

- that we are relentlessly **student focused**. We systematically gain insights into our students and use data to tailor our model for a personalised experience.
- we place a high value on **positive relationships**, to create the best learning, living and working environment to support positive outcomes. We cultivate relationships with students across all phases of their journey and greatly value collaboration between colleagues and with partners.
- we focus on **continuous enhancement**. Notwithstanding our 2017 **TEF Gold rating** we have continued to enhance our approach.

We have used a range of qualitative and quantitative sources of evidence, as well as citing from external documents and awards. For ease, information about source documentation and representativeness is included in the References section. Endnotes have also been used.

Reputation

We are The Times & Sunday Times Modern University of the Year 2022

*'After 18 months of turmoil across all walks of life, our University of the Year Awards this year highlight exceptional achievement in adverse circumstances. For its ability to deliver in this regard, as well as long-standing achievements more widely, Edge Hill is also one of just five to make the shortlist for the overall UK University of the Year, in addition to its win as **Modern University of the Year.**'¹* We continue to gain widespread recognition for our work, being:

- **The Times & Sunday Times, University of the Year for Student Retention 2018/19** ²
- **The University of the Year, Educate North 2021** ³
- **The Educate North Winner Mental Health & Wellbeing 2022** ⁴
- **Top University in the North-West, WhatUni Student Choice Awards 2022** ⁵
- **The Times Higher Education Top 250 – The Young University Rankings 2022** ⁶
- **The Times Higher Education Top 1000 - The World University Rankings 2023** ⁷

1.1. Location

Our success to date was not pre-ordained. Indeed, arguably, both our geography and student demographics militate against it. We are tucked away in a small market town in West Lancashire in

the North West of England; we do not have the advantage of sharing our name or location with a major town or city. But we attract a diverse range of students.

1.2. Our Students

'Edge Hill is one of the shining stars of the University sector...Edge Hill has established a profile nationally as a go-ahead institution with ambition for its students.'

Alistair McCall, Editor, The Times & Sunday Times Good University Guide 2022⁸

Most of our students come from non-traditional higher education backgrounds:

- 77% have at least one widening participation characteristic ⁹
- 48% come with BTEC, Access or alternative L3 qualifications rather than A levels
- 47% come from households with intermediate or routine/manual occupations
- 46% come from the highest areas of deprivation (IMD quintile 1 or 2) ¹⁰
- 43% (of those who know) are the first in their family to go to university ¹¹

We are proud of what we and our students have achieved to date, the sustained nature of our progress and we remain ambitious for the future.

2. Our Mission & Values

Edge Hill University was founded in 1885 as the first non-denominational teacher training college for women. Our roots are in widening access, providing opportunities in education and social advancement for those who would otherwise be denied it. Throughout our long history, we have sought to deliver this, being at the forefront of widening access, leading the sector both nationally and regionally including hosting AimHigher (NW), the Lifelong Learning Network and National Action on Access.

We continue to be driven by our belief that all students from all backgrounds should have access to the highest quality higher education experience. Edge Hill University provides a key opportunity to overcome the educational, economic and social disadvantages our students have faced: we seek to empower them to mirror our values of authenticity, confidence and aspiration and to recognise the difference they can make. Our task therefore is twofold: to support our students to **gain their qualifications and to provide an outstanding, personalised experience which is transformative**; an experience which both supports and challenges students to excel academically and exposes them to diverse opportunities to develop a range of skills, attributes and experiences which will enable them to compete in the labour market.

Ensuring our students leave with more than a qualification forms the bedrock of our **educational gains**, articulated through our **Graduates Attributes**. These are detailed on p.19 but referenced throughout: supporting students to *develop* and *evidence* these attributes pervades both our academic and extra-curricular experience. We live our mission and values in many ways, and they drive the decisions we take and the things we prioritise, as demonstrated by two examples.

2.1. Tackling the Blues

Launched in 2015, Tackling the Blues is a multi-award-winning joint initiative between Edge Hill, Tate Liverpool and Everton Football Club. Based in schools, it is a sport & arts mental health education programme focussed on early intervention. To date 3,222 of our students have acted as mentors, helping the region's pupils deal with mental health and emotional challenges. The positive impact on the wellbeing and attainment of children has informed the national policy debate and the

programme's research rated as world-leading in the recent REF. In addition, it has also been transformational for our own students. 93% of those participating cited an improvement in communication skills, 80% said the programme improved their self-awareness and networking skills and over 80% have progressed to graduate level employment.¹²

2.2. The Medical School

*'The commitment to WP is commendable. WP has been threaded through all aspects of the planning stages and is clearly embedded within the wider university.'*¹³

Despite the most deprived regions, including our own, having the worst health challenges, 80% of medical students come from 20% of, largely elite, schools. In 2018 we were awarded one of only three new, free-standing medical schools and, the only one to develop its own curriculum, tailored to the needs of the deprived communities our students come from and will work in. Our innovative 'Widening Access to Medicine' outreach programme and our Foundation Year for Medicine provide access to a cohort of medics with lived experience of the communities within which they will practice. Now in its 4th year, following coverage on the BBC and in The Times, it is influencing national debate. Most importantly, students are succeeding, with, to date, a 97% completion rate.

3. Our Culture and Ethos

Our strong belief in the value of positive relationships underpins our approach to the student experience.

3.1. Knowing Our Students: 'Getting to Know You'

Throughout their journey, **we invest in understanding our students**, their experiences, skills, and aspirations. We use these insights, as well as data, to design tailored, personalised support. Whilst relationships at all levels are important, academic colleagues in particular cultivate a strong sense of partnership; this enables us to stretch and challenge students in a supportive environment, enabling them to achieve their full potential. The success of our approach is evidenced by our outcomes, notably **our very strong continuation and completion rates**.

Whilst individual relationships are central to our culture, we also have well embedded institutional practices to support our personalised approach. Our 'Getting to Know You' Survey goes to all new entrants before they start and is designed to elicit information about students' prior experiences and expectations of university. The latest iteration, with 1895 respondents, shows that 77% of incoming students know what is expected of them academically and 73% feel confident asking for help with academic issues; 83% feel they have the appropriate academic skills to succeed at university.¹⁴ The Survey is repeated for returning students, to help us understand the distance travelled between years of study [SE7]. Alongside the Getting to Know You Survey data, academic departments also receive data on the qualifications and demographics of their incoming students. This intelligence is used to inform tailored induction/reinduction and respond to student concerns, whether about academic preparedness or fitting in and confidence.

Our Induction Framework,¹⁵ with which all academic departments engage, therefore places as much importance on developing relationships and confidence as on 'hard' academic skills; establishing a **sense of belonging** at an early stage is a key contributor to student retention. Our NSS 2022 data indicates we are **2% above benchmark for the Learning Community** questions,¹⁶ illustrating the effectiveness of our approach. [SE7, SO2].

3.2. Understanding Students' Motivations

A key motivator for students to fully engage with their studies is to have an aim beyond the qualification. For many this is about having a positive career objective. To understand where our students are in their journey to '**Career Readiness**' we embed key questions into our enrolment and re-enrolment process; the outputs from this are shared with relevant departments to enable personalised conversations to help students move towards their career aspirations. [SE7]

Whilst this is, in part, about supporting the best possible academic outcomes, it is also part of our commitment to **educational gains**. [SO4]. For many, university provides an important opportunity to gain new life experiences (to travel, learn a language, gain work experience) and new skills, including social skills and confidence, to compete in the world of work. We strongly encourage students to become involved in wider student life. This may be through the free access to our theatres and cinema; joining clubs and societies run by the Students' Union (SU); participating in the Student Representative structure or engaging in volunteering, Study Abroad or other extracurricular activities. Such activities not only enhance a sense of belonging, supporting retention, but can boost an individual's sense of esteem, wellbeing, and confidence. To support this, **both we and our SU have mapped our extra-curricular offer** against our Graduate Attributes so students can see how participation supports employability.

3.3. Working Collaboratively

No matter what insights we gain, our students' experience can only ever be as excellent as the staff delivering it. Our collegiate, empowering culture requires all colleagues - academic, professional, and support – to share a common purpose, and to feel empowered to do the right thing for students. Sustaining such a culture requires **investment in relationships and communications** to share information and priorities. We have deliberate approaches to this:

- The VC delivers an in person 'Termly Address' open to all staff
- Weekly personalised, communications are sent directly by the VC - so they are timely and relevant - to all colleagues, the Board, and the SU.
- A bi-monthly Student Experience Forum, led by the PVC (Student Experience), brings together all academic Heads and Directors of Service to focus on strategy and action.
- The PVC (Student Experience) and the Head of Student Engagement in the SU have a weekly exchange about top priorities for the student body.
- The University and the SU have a Data Sharing Agreement to support access to intelligence across the two organisations. Whilst this is uncommon across the Sector, it forms an important part of our **holistic** approach to student support.

But being empowered to act in the right way is about more than understanding the priorities. It requires colleagues with the right skills and a collective appreciation of the complementary roles we each play to make things work. One example of our systematic approach to support this is staff Toolkits.

3.4. Supporting Staff to Support Students

Student mental health is an area of growing concern across the Sector, with important implications for retention. Whilst the availability of expert support is vital, we recognised that if we wanted to have a more profound impact we needed to engage the wider staff body in promoting conversations about mental health and wellbeing. In 2018 we launched the '**Wellbeing for All**' project to support positive student and staff mental health. This led to our first '**Supporting Staff to Support Students**' toolkit. The roll out of the toolkit was accompanied by training focused on

areas such as establishing boundaries, making effective referrals and closing support gaps. It is now an established mental health resource, enabling staff to be confident in broaching the subject, and to know when to refer students. 94% reported they felt more confident identifying signs of mental ill-health, 91% felt more confident about discussing mental health and 96% felt more confident in making specialist referrals.¹⁷[SE4, SE5]

This approach was highly effective so we have invested in dedicated resource to develop a further nine toolkits. The support for staff has clearly positively impacted students as, in our most recent Student Voice Survey, 87% of respondents know who to speak to if they need help.¹⁸

3.5. A Student-Centred Approach

Whilst these interventions are part of our student support strategy, they are also illustrative of a culture which recognises the importance of supporting all colleagues to feel confident in dealing with challenging student support issues, ensuring that there are experts on hand to help. Our whole support system, academic and pastoral, revolves around a range of student-centric, mutually reinforcing practices, designed to support positive outcomes. Our students are represented on all key Committees and Groups. **We have also worked closely with our SU in the preparation of this submission.**

During the period being assessed, our student-focus was also illustrated by the speed, quality and scale of our pandemic response. We designed a holistic support package, aimed at ensuring no student was prevented from continuing their studies by these unprecedented events. It addressed a range of financial, wellbeing and academic concerns, involving the investment of approximately £5m. Our response represented Sector-leading practice and we were one of just two providers commended in the House of Commons by the then Minister for Higher Education, Michelle Donelan, for our exemplary handling of the student experience.¹⁹ [SE5, SO1]

4. The Academic Experience and Assessment

We deliver an outstanding academic experience consisting of multiple dimensions:

- an engaging and coherent curriculum, underpinned by contemporary research, scholarship and practice as appropriate to the discipline.
- delivered by enthusiastic and inspiring academics who both stretch and support students to maximise their potential.
- inclusive and varied assessment practices which not only test knowledge but are an integral part of learning, aiding skills development and attainment.
- delivered in a learning environment, both physical and virtual, which is well resourced and thoughtfully designed to optimise learning.
- with the engagement of partners and employers to inform the effective embedding of employability skills throughout our provision.
- a personalised experience - academic and pastoral - ensuring high levels of student engagement as active partners in their learning.

We see these as complementary parts of a holistic system, designed to both support excellence and remove barriers to positive outcomes. The success of our approach is evidenced by **outstanding rates of continuation and completion.**

On **full-time continuation**, we exceed benchmark, achieving a positive outcome for **91.3%** of our students. We also exceed benchmark in 20 of the 21 metrics split by characteristic. For **part-time**

continuation, we exceed benchmark by a statistically significant 4.6%. For completion we are a statistically significant 3.4% above benchmark for full-time students; further, we are above benchmark on every single one of the 50 indicators, statistically significantly above on 82% of those indicators (41 of the 50). [SO2] ²⁰

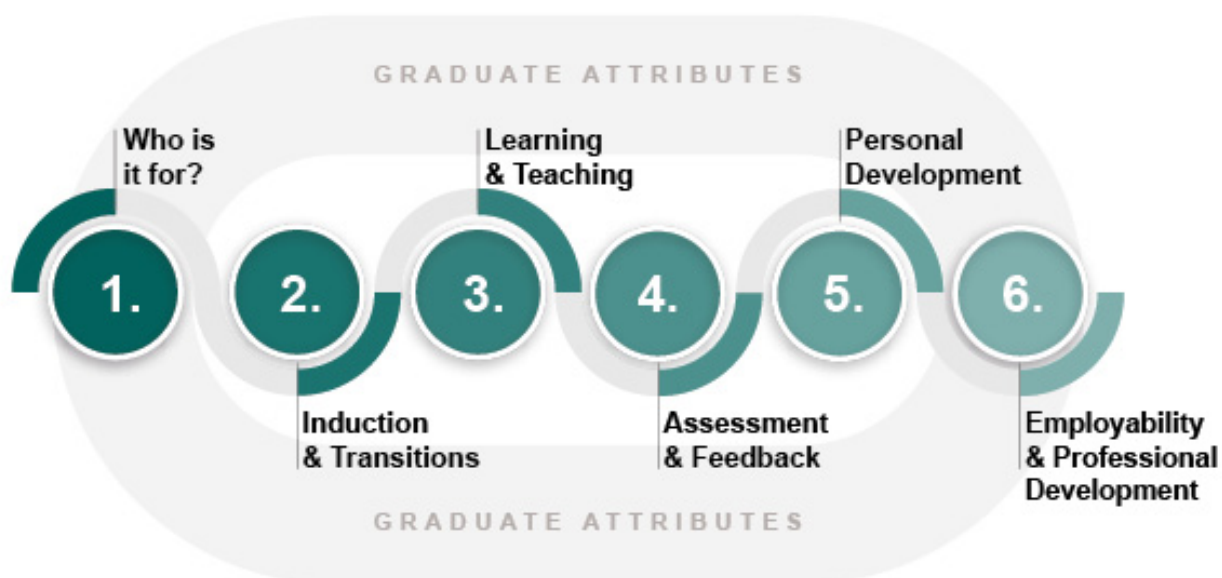
Whilst part-time completion appears low, this is solely due to the inclusion, up until 2012, of ITE students who were studying standalone modules (but were, in line with DfE policy, recorded on a qualification). The amendment to Government policy in 2012 can be clearly seen in the time series data when, from years 3 and 4, these students were excluded, and we **exceed the completion benchmark by a statistically significant 16.3% and 13.6% respectively for these two years**. When set against our diverse student body, we consider this to be a significant achievement and testament to the investment we make in tailoring our support. [SE5, SO2]

4.1. Delivering an Outstanding Experience - The Taught Degrees Framework

Our Taught Degrees Framework²¹ embeds coherent and consistent curriculum design and has been in place for over a decade. It was reviewed in 2020 when, in response to staff feedback, we initiated a redesign to create an interactive Framework, which is a more purposeful, working document (see below).

This guides the design of all taught curriculum, ensuring consistency, whilst enabling academics to use creativity and expertise in content and delivery. It is designed to ensure our curriculum:

- Is **personalised**, at every stage, from induction to graduation, so that all students, from all backgrounds, are supported to succeed.
- Includes opportunities for students to **co-design** the experience and activity that helps to engender a **sense of belonging** into a shared community of learning.
- Is **well-planned, diverse and engaging** so that students are supported and challenged in equal measure to fully engage with learning and assessment
- **Integrates the core attributes** we seek to support students to develop as graduates



4.2. The Taught Degrees Framework: Lens One – Who Is it For?

The first lens requires a vision statement for the programme, addressing the question ‘Who is it for?’ paying attention to the types of students we are seeking to attract and our ability to support them. The answer informs the design of the curriculum across all other lenses, ensuring all aspects of academic and pastoral support are designed in a coherent way, to deliver outstanding teaching, assessment and support, *for the target audience*.

4.3. The Taught Degrees Framework: Lens Two - Induction & Transitions

Effective induction and support to transition between phases of study (across levels, into work experience, beyond university) is fundamentally important to student success. Teams must articulate how they will design Induction and manage Transitions, demonstrating alignment with the University’s Induction Framework addressing the course, student support, student life, learning community, skills and assessment. As above, whilst this is planned at the curriculum design stage, at the point of delivery, it is informed in real time by insights about the actual student cohort from the Getting to Know You Survey, thus ensuring it is appropriately tailored. There are equivalent processes for continuing students, during ‘Welcome Back Week’, which take account of the distance travelled and prepares students for their next phase of study. [SE7] Students are very positive about induction: 91% say they know how they will be assessed; 86% understand the academic skills needed to succeed; 86% report confidence in the course they have chosen; and 80% indicate both that they understand the value of extracurricular activities, how to get involved, and where to go for help.²² [SE5, SE7].

4.4. The Taught Degrees Framework: Lens Three - Learning & Teaching (L&T)

Teams must articulate the planned approach to Learning & Teaching; this includes evidence of how course content will be designed to stretch, support and engage students, including their active participation in co-creation; how it will be underpinned by contemporary research, scholarship and practice; the balance between different aspects of learning including taught sessions, independent learning, and practice; and the nature and variety of learning opportunities between, for example, large and small group work, practical sessions in laboratories, studios, simulation or work-based settings.

In the Arts & Sciences, the Module Enrichment Framework **embeds work-related learning into the curriculum**. To enable this, the ASPIRE programme engages external organisations to ensure there are placements and internships for students on all courses, presented in bespoke Departmental placement handbooks, whilst support is also provided for self-sourced placements. Over the past 3 years 1500 students on non-professionally regulated programmes have accessed specific work-related opportunities aligned to their desired outcomes.²³ These are augmented by employer mentors and Masterclasses. [SO1]

We aim not simply to support positive progress through the qualification but to inculcate a love of learning. This requires inspirational delivery, in a supportive and engaging environment and the effective integration of technology, as described below.

4.5. The People - Supporting Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Assessment

The single greatest influence on students’ enjoyment and engagement with their studies is the quality of teaching and assessment. We have a well-established infrastructure, designed both to support the development of individuals, and to promote innovation and best practice. Our

dedicated Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT) is responsible for supporting teaching excellence through delivery of: our Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching & Learning in HE (PGCert), the UK Professional Standards Framework (PSF) award scheme, our Teaching and Learning Fellowship Scheme, and our CPD programme. In 2022, **96.4% of all academic staff** have, or are actively working towards, a **recognised teaching qualification**.²⁴ [SE4]. According to our most recent Advance HE Review,²⁵ Edge Hill consistently performs significantly above sector averages for the percentage of academic staff with Fellowship at all levels. This illustrates the importance we place on equipping academics to deliver an outstanding experience. [SE4]

Our CLT also supports the continuous enhancement of teaching excellence. Our University Teaching & Learning Fellowship Scheme has operated since 2004 and, alongside, 10 National Teaching Fellows, we have 43 academic and academic-related colleagues with Fellowship: they form the bedrock of our vibrant academic community committed to the importance of excellence in Learning & Teaching. Fellowship is awarded to those who, through a rigorous recruitment process, demonstrate a track record of excellence in teaching and student support, and a commitment to the development of others. Our scheme is structured around our three Faculties and is an important part of our educational ecosystem ensuring that our policy and practices in Learning & Teaching, as well as assessment and student support, are embedded. Fellows also support curriculum design and our CPD series, and mentor and assess applications for Fellowship against the UKPSF.

Our vibrant CPD programme showcases cutting edge practice, including the SU's 'lessons of excellence' from student votes in the Student Led Staff Awards. We have a history of high engagement and 89% of academics attended this years 'Celebration of Teaching Excellence'. *'One important indicator of any university's level of commitment to learning and teaching is the scale and scope of relevant professional development events. It has been a privilege to be associated with Edge Hill and witness the energy, quality, and sustained engagement demonstrated'.* (Professor Peter Hartley, NTF, PFHEA)

Continuous enhancement in Teaching & Learning is a key part of our culture: in 2020 the collaboration between our CLT and Academic Quality Unit won a Collaborative Teaching Excellence Award (CATE) from Advance HE for our focus on systematically using quality management processes to surface and disseminate best practice.²⁶

Cumulatively, this activity complements the career development structure and the evidence and impact from the above activities provide evidence for promotion to **Fellowship and Professorships in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education** [SE4].

Whilst we place a high value on pedagogy (including pedagogic research), teaching excellence goes beyond this. We do not have 'Teaching Only' contracts so all academics are expected to engage in research, scholarship and/or practice, as appropriate and teams must show how this supports contemporary content and inspirational delivery. Many of our staff hold professional qualifications and our community includes actors, dancers, musicians, lawyers, accountants, psychologists and others. In Health, those teaching professionally regulated programmes must maintain their registration: in Nursing for example, this requires the completion of 450 practice hours over 3 years, which is embedded into workload models. In Education, 12% of workload is allocated for colleagues to maintain their professional currency. Colleagues also maintain

academic currency through research which informs their teaching and, in the latest REF, 83% of colleagues teaching across the Arts and Sciences were returned with global excellence evident in every submitted Unit of Assessment. External Examiners validate our approach, citing how students demonstrate *“scholarship in their assignments. They benefit from both research active tutors who share insights they have gained...and also from exposure to a rich variety of external speakers and opportunities.”*²⁷ [SE2, SE3]

4.6. The Places - Supporting Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Assessment

A key element of excellence in teaching is delivering engaging and authentic experiences.

Providing learning facilities for simulation is an integral part of our offer: virtually every discipline has its own ‘home’ with bespoke facilities designed to support excellence.

- In Health, our state-of-the-art Clinical Skills & Simulation Centre houses hospital wards, an operating theatre, consulting rooms, and digital, programmable patients.
- Our fully furnished flat provides a flexible, real-world setting within which Social Workers, Paramedics and others can practice their skills
- Our immersive Police Simulation and Training Suite recreates a police station for aspiring criminologists and police officers to learn in simulated crime scenes.
- In Law, our mock court room allows students to practise their advocacy skills.
- Our Media building houses industry standard studios for Film, TV and animation work
- Performing Arts students hone their craft in the Arts Centre which houses two theatres and multiple studio spaces
- Our GeoSciences and BioSciences departments have high specification labs, DNA extraction and analysis equipment and climate-controlled insectaries.
- In Computing, our Technology Hub provides a business hatchery, sandpit and a high definition 4K virtual simulation Computer Augmented Virtual Environment (CAVE), the first in any British university.
- Sports students have access to an expansive fitness suite, swimming pool, running track and dedicated sports therapy clinic and rehabilitation centre.

Academic and technical staff are trained to use these facilities to support the delivery of engaging and real-world learning experiences. Whilst the facilities are aligned to departments, many are used to support inter-disciplinary learning with scenarios designed across professional areas to mirror real-life scenarios students will encounter. [SE2, SE6]

4.7. Technology - Supporting Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Assessment

“I’ve been associated with [the CETL] since soon after its inception... From my current role view of working on digital developments and practices for HE worldwide, it’s rare to see such consistent, determined, and valuable contributions to benefit staff and students.” [SE6]

(Professor Gilly Salmon, CEO Education Alchemists)

Whilst we are a **‘face to face’ provider** we have long recognised the added value from the **thoughtful integration of technology** into the curriculum. During curriculum design, teams show how they will comply with institutional expectations around technology enhanced learning (TEL) as articulated in our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) Baseline. We have had a baseline in our curriculum for over a decade, derived from our status as a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL), including TEL. Technology does not replace in person teaching but is part of an ‘as well as’ model, used to add value in and between in-person sessions.

4.8. Digital Interns

In 2021 we created a Digital Interns Scheme to ensure the active engagement of students in decisions about the further development of digital learning materials in the spirit of co-creation and collaboration. We employed 40 students as full-time staff for 12 weeks over the summer, aligned to academic departments who devised content, based on student feedback. The Scheme is hugely successful, and we believe, contributes to satisfaction with Learning Resources: in NSS 2022, we were above benchmark on every single question. [SE2, SE7] In addition to the institutional benefits, the interns have a hugely positive experience, as detailed on p.20 below.

We hope it is evident that we prioritise investment in people, and in physical and virtual resources to ensure excellence in Learning & Teaching and we have embedded practices to support this: we consider our success to be evident in our strong student continuation and completion rates, demonstrating students' active engagement in their learning. [SE1, SE2, SO1, SO2]

4.9. Data in Context

Despite the excellence of our outcomes, and our above benchmark performance against three of the five NSS metrics, we are disappointed by our performance in the NSS during the period under consideration: there are mitigating factors which we consider relevant in assessing our excellence.

We believe our performance in all NSS metrics, even those where we are above benchmark, was negatively impacted by two factors: first, and probably most significant, is industrial action on the part of some academic staff. This occurred in late 2019, when we were one of just nine English universities, where action was taken on Terms & Conditions. Whilst we took all possible steps to mitigate the action, it did have a negative impact, reflected in the NSS 2020. Immediately following this, from March 2020, we had the pandemic. Although this has been benchmarked, there were additional impacts for our students, resulting from our subject mix, in both 2021 and 2022. 78% of our programmes, incorporate some element of practice-based learning²⁸ and whilst we maintained in-person teaching when it was permitted, the breadth of impact was significant across practice-based subjects. The most profound impact however, was on students studying in Health, notably Nursing, which formed approximately 20% of our respondents in NSS 2021 and 2022.

The main challenge was our ability to deliver on the 50% of the Nursing Programme which is practice-based learning, given the restrictions in health settings. This impacted all NSS questions but the perceptions of teaching (which should have been practice based), and student voice were most difficult to mitigate. Students were especially concerned that they would be delayed in completing their Programme and we could not entirely ameliorate that concern. Whilst we negotiated additional hours to be covered via simulation, the Covid-restrictions meant they were sub-optimal. In the event, no Health students were delayed in completion, but their experience was different to that we had planned. This was a national concern and all providers with significant health provision, such as ourselves, were severely impacted in the NSS although we outperformed all other 'mass' providers in our region.

The impact of these two events is writ large in our NSS data. Despite this, much of our performance is very strong, with four of the five indicators in the most recent two years, exceeding benchmark. For student voice, in response to the question *'it is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted upon'* we are **3% above benchmark**. [SE7].

4.10. Recognition of Excellence

Prior to these events, in 2018, we were one of only five Universities globally to receive a Global Teaching Excellence Spotlight Award from Advance HE in recognition of *'the quality of support and engagement infrastructure for students.'* In a year where the Chair of judges described the entries as 'very high calibre', the judging panel commended our *'vision to provide an intellectually stimulating, creative and inclusive environment'* with learning and teaching *'of the highest standard.'*²⁹

4.11. The Taught Degrees Framework: Lens Four - Assessment & Feedback

Lens Four of the Taught Degrees Framework requires an articulation of the Assessment & Feedback strategy for the Programme, how it is suited to students and how it will support employability. We have high levels of satisfaction in our Assessment & Feedback metrics: **+1.2% above benchmark and +2.5% and +2.7% above in each of the last 2 years**, demonstrating a strong trajectory. Further, in the NSS 2022 we were **above benchmark for Assessment & Feedback on every single question**, and significantly so on the timeliness of feedback. This supports an important principle in our institutional Assessment Policy: that assessment is not just about an end point, but an integral part of the learning journey: assessment *for*, not simply *of* learning, is strongly embedded into our practice. [SE1]

Developing students' assessment literacy is key and this must be designed in: the fact that 91% of students understand how they will be assessed following induction is due to investment at the design stage. At validation teams demonstrate how students will be supported to understand the purpose and forms of assessment, how judgements are reached and how grades and feedback align with intended learning outcomes. Students are given examples of marked work and tutors model the marking, grading and feedback process in taught sessions, before students practise the same. Teams also show how formative assessment, which further supports assessment literacy, will be used.

Students are more engaged and inspired when their studies and skills development are relevant to the 'real world'. Therefore, teams show how the University's requirements on **Authentic Assessment** will be addressed through the use of a variety of forms such as case studies or work placements, designed to ensure students see their study as having the potential to make a difference. Authentic assessment also supports inclusive and personalised assessment as well as an opportunity to demonstrate key employability skills. [SE1, SO1]

4.12. The Taught Degrees Framework: Lenses Five & Six - Personal and Professional Development and Employability

These lenses ensure curriculum design addresses not only how students will be taught and assessed, but how they will be supported to **engage and develop beyond their qualification**. Whilst students draw support from many academic colleagues, teams must show how they comply with the baseline requirements in our Personal Tuition Policy, which is based on Sector research and best practice in the delivery of outstanding academic support.

The Personal Tutor is the key interface between the academic and pastoral aspects of the experience and makes an important contribution to our personalised approach. Students are assigned a Tutor for their period of study who they meet in the first week and regularly thereafter. Personal Tutors participate in training, so they are fully appraised of the core expectations including minimum timetabled meetings, guidance on content and recording, and how to draw on

additional support or refer students to expert advice. Tutors are instrumental not only in monitoring academic progress but in encouraging engagement in learning opportunities and extra-curricular activity so students become independent learners, whilst developing both new interests and graduate attributes. In terms of professional development, the majority of our provision is accredited by Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Bodies, and Personal Tutors support students in ensuring they are on track to achieve any specific professional requirements. [SE5, SE7]. Our approach to personal tuition is fully embedded and, we believe, is a key contributor to our strong continuation and completion rates, as well as our sustained, **positive satisfaction levels for academic support**. [SE5]

4.13. Developing our Graduates - Graduate Attributes

Our Graduate Attributes form an overarching frame for the Taught Degrees Framework as a key **part of our employability and educational gains approach**. They are mapped across the curriculum with teams showing how they will support students to understand how they will develop these through their studies. See p.19 below for further details.

5. Resources, Support & Student Engagement

Our TEF indicator for **Learning Resources is statistically significantly above benchmark at +5.4%**. This sustained high performance is a result of ensuring that our resources – human, physical, digital - fully complement each other to support students to reach their potential.

5.1. Our Campus

Our Campus Masterplan, developed over 20 years ago, was specifically designed to provide an exceptional learning and living environment. All surplus income is reinvested to make the Plan a reality and £300mn has been invested in the campus over the last decade, delivering seventeen new buildings since gaining University title in 2006. Careful consideration is given to not only creating the best possible educational spaces, but also supporting employability; as detailed above, many of our spaces, provide authentic, industry-standard environments. Work has recently begun on a £17mn Life Sciences Building, £5.8mn of which has been provided by the Office for Students, to support our advancement in STEM. We are also building a new, £9mn Students' Union facility, designed in partnership with the SU. Students clearly appreciate our approach to investment: we were **second in the UK for University Facilities** in the WhatUni Student Choice Awards 2022 ³⁰ and in the **Top 5 in the UK for University Halls**.³¹ We have deliberately invested so we can guarantee accommodation to all first year students: we consider this to be an important element of the experience, with students living in our halls 3.5% ³² more likely to stay on programme. [SO2]. We are **sixteenth in the UK for 'Facilities Spend'** in the Complete University Guide 2023.³³

Whilst the physical environment really matters in supporting outstanding teaching and learning, it is what happens inside the buildings that makes the greatest difference, and our investment in digital learning is consistently commended by students: in NSS 2022 we are **6th nationally for Q18 'The IT resources and facilities provided have supported my learning well'**.

5.2. The Catalyst: Co-location and Collaboration

*'The Catalyst...is phenomenal and the support they offer made me turn my degree around.'*³⁴

Our single largest investment in a new building project was the Catalyst, opened in 2018. The vision was to create a One-Stop Hub for students, in the heart of campus. Co-locating Library and Learning Services, Student Services and Careers under one roof, the Catalyst is a physical

representation of the holistic student experience; it places services where students are rather than expecting students to seek them out. Eliminating 'student bounce' and multiple referrals between services was also a key part of our strategy; this was realised by the creation of a single, front line enquiry service where all student queries, no matter what they are, can be dealt with, there and then, by highly trained staff. Students responded very positively to the integrated service model illustrated by a 27% increase in enquiries³⁵ during the first year of operation and **consistently positive NSS Comments** demonstrating how embedded the Catalyst 'brand' is. [SE5]. Broadening out the library offer to include holistic support on a single site has led to increased satisfaction with the library service itself: in NSS 2022 we were ranked **2nd nationally for Q19 'The library resources (books, online services and learning spaces) have supported my learning well'**. [SE6]

6. Student Support

Students mainly identify with their academic discipline and draw support from their academic and Personal Tutors. In addition, however, we have a wealth of expert central support: Careers, Student Services and Learning Services (co-located in the Catalyst) work directly with students and in close partnership with academic departments. Professional Services colleagues contribute to the academic CPD programme, including through the 'Supporting Staff to Support Students' Toolkits, and through Personal Tutor training, as well as nurturing close working relationships day to day, so student support is joined up. This collaborative working is a key characteristic of our offer and a contributory factor in our **above benchmark Academic Support metric**, as well as our continuation and completion rates. In 2020 we were also **Finalists in the Times Higher Education Outstanding Student Support category for our combined service**.³⁶ [SE5, SE7].

6.1. Developing Academic Skills

Our students come with diverse qualifications and experiences so ensuring they are equipped with the academic skills to succeed is vital to outcomes. We have a broad academic skills support offer, including our 'UniSkills' programme, consisting of 60 workshop topics, such as critical thinking, academic writing and research skills. Confidence and resilience are also key to success, so our innovative '**Grow Your Academic Resilience**' workshops aim at equipping students with practical tools to nurture their resilience and deal constructively with feedback. Our Workshops are delivered by Academic Skills Advisers supported by Student Advisers, providing invaluable peer support. Students can also access UniSkills online or arrange 1-2-1 support as required. Our tailored approach has delivered a **48% increase in engagement** since 2019. ³⁷A recent survey of students who attended 1-2-1 appointments showed 100% felt the support received gave them confidence to deal with their academic challenge³⁸. [SE5]. As well as equipping our students with the skills to succeed, we place a strong emphasis on encouraging attendance and engagement as key to retention, attainment and progression.

6.2. Attendance and Engagement – Early Intervention

Student retention has always been a top priority. In 2018/19 when we were **The Times & Sunday Times 'University of the Year for Student Retention'** they said, '*Edge Hill, our University of the Year for Student Retention, is establishing itself among the top 10 post 1992 universities...Its dropout rate of 8.3% over the course of a degree programme is well below the expected level of 12.4%,³⁹ helping it to earn the accolade*'. In the years since that award, we have continued to excel in this area, as evidenced by our TEF continuation and completion rates. Whilst we are proud of this, we feel the loss of every student and we are constantly looking for ways to improve.

Throughout the last academic year we built on our existing best practice developing the 'Early Intervention Model' for all students entering or returning in 2022. Phase 1 of the model re-emphasises the role of monitoring attendance and engagement data, at least bi-weekly, to identify signs of disengagement as early as possible. Phase 2 ensures that where disengagement is identified, tailored support is triggered as quickly as possible: this includes a range of measures to get students back on track, from informal check-ins to enhanced Personal Tuition or bespoke Learner Agreements, as required.

Where the student's concerns are academic, they will be supported by the academic department; often however, the reasons for disengagement are complex and multi-dimensional and it is not appropriate to expect academic colleagues to support them alone. In such scenarios, a case management approach is required so, under Phase 3 of the Model, colleagues refer to the Student Support Team. Given the risks of withdrawal, the Student Support Team quickly meets with the student to unpack their concerns. Where necessary, this expert team acts as a co-ordinating service for referrals to other functions (such as Wellbeing or Money Advice). Having a single locus to help navigate through and tailor the support is vital where students are vulnerable. This is facilitated by the co-location of specialist services in the Catalyst, working collaboratively.

Throughout the process, the Student Support Team maintains contact with the designated lead in the academic department and they act as a 'double lock' mechanism to ensure joint dialogue and ownership between Academic and Professional Services. This year to date 84% of students referred (or self-referred) to the Student Support Team are still on programme⁴⁰; staff referrals have more than doubled ⁴¹showing raised awareness of mechanisms to support retention and in-year withdrawals in 2022/23 are down by 7%.⁴² [SE5, SE7, SO1, SO2]

6.3. Removing Barriers to Engagement

Ensuring equality of opportunity for all is a key part of our ethos; for students to realise their potential they need both excellent teaching and support and for unnecessary barriers to be removed. This philosophy permeates our entire support offer. Two significant barriers for many students are finance and wellbeing so we are proactive in addressing these issues.

6.4. Financial Support

In 2022 national data showed 82% of students were worried about making ends meet and 52%⁴³ had thought about dropping out of university due to money worries. This resonates with our experience, so we have a range of initiatives across the journey to support student success.

Even before students commence, we pay for DBS checks for all students who require them. All *compulsory* course costs, including field trips, essential texts and equipment are included in the fee so there are no unexpected costs. More broadly, our £1.2mn Student Support Fund supports students in financial hardship. It considers students' individual circumstances to ensure they receive the maximum support but also tailors support as appropriate, for example to include budgeting advice. Our responsiveness translates into real impact: **92%** of students in receipt of financial support said it had been '**important or very important**' in allowing them **to continue with their studies** and 75% ⁴⁴said the fund enabled them to concentrate on their studies. This is vital given over half of the applicants to our Fund live in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in the UK. [SE5, SE7, SO1, SO2]

Given the cost-of-living challenges, we have increased our already significant Student Support Fund, upped our emergency grants by 20%, boosted individual hardship payments by a third and the number of non-standard awards are currently 200% higher than the previous academic year. Whilst this is a significant additional investment, we know this makes a difference to student retention and attainment which are our primary concern. Further, we keep our accommodation costs low – approximately 15% below the market rate – to support students from all backgrounds to live as well as learn at the University. The link between our financial support, academic performance and student retention has long been noted. In 2018 the Times & Sunday Times Good University Guide described how our *'award-winning finance support package rewards achievement as well encouraging students to complete their studies rather than simply offering incentives for enrolling.'*

6.5. Wellbeing Support

The impact of positive wellbeing on academic achievement is well documented. As described above we have embedded a whole-institution response through our Mental Health Toolkit and our Personal Tutor training. This includes access to outstanding Counselling and Wellbeing services based in the Catalyst. The team support students experiencing low mood or stress; in 2021/22 students rated the Wellbeing Services they received as 4.75 out of 5 and 100% of respondents reported that the support they received helped them to stay at university.⁴⁵ Of a sample of students who recently received Counselling support, 87% reported it had improved their overall experience and 82% claimed it improved their performance in academic work.⁴⁶ [SE5, SE7, SO1, SO2] *'When I first came to counselling I was feeling low, depressed and down, wanting to... leave, but thanks to it I have been able to talk about my issue and... feel ready to complete my degree.'*

6.6. Student Opportunity

Our *Student Opportunity Fund* supports student participation in employment-enhancing activities which would otherwise be cost prohibitive. It funds study enhancement activity for *all students at academic department level* to ensure consistency of experience (e.g. field trips for biologists, visits to Parliament for politics students, enterprise competition fees for business students, trips to Brussels for law students, film festivals for film and TV students); it also *supports individuals* who can apply for up to £2000 to support a career-enhancing opportunity. It can be used for an array of reasons: to perform artistic works, deliver conference papers or support internships. These are things which, without financial support, would be inaccessible to many students but which have a demonstrable impact in enhancing their opportunities beyond university and into employment. [SO1, SO3, SO4, SO5]

7. Student Engagement

7.1. A Partnership Approach

Insights into students' wants and needs are vital in ensuring we continue to facilitate exceptional Student Outcomes. Representative insights require genuine, consistent and multi-faceted student engagement methods. A key part of our approach is active collaboration with the SU as the students' representative body. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Experience) and Head of Student Voice at the SU are in weekly contact to ensure there is real-time communication about priorities and a direct conduit for students into senior management. This is supported by the SU's vibrant Course Representative structure: every course has a designated Rep to gather and feedback student views. Every academic department has regular Student Staff Consultative Forums to encourage dialogue. SU officers are also key members of Committees in the deliberative structure

making a valuable contribution to decision making. In NSS 2022 our **SU was in the top quartile for Student Satisfaction, 6% above benchmark**, indicating that students feel their interests are effectively represented.

7.2. Gaining Insights

In addition, we gather individual and group student feedback in a variety of ways to actively inform what we do, allowing us to continuously improve the experience. These include:

- Sounding Boards
- Student Feedback Panels
- Student-Staff Consultative Forums
- Mid-Course and End of Course Student Voice Surveys
- Interactive Consultation Stations

Our feedback mechanisms are used strategically: for example, Student Voice Surveys are deliberately timed so students can offer their views on various academic-related questions including the support during assessment windows; interactive consultation stations are placed in the areas of highest footfall to hear from students who may not be inclined to complete a survey. We devote a significant amount of time and resource to student engagement, but we are always looking for new ways to hear from students. [SE7]

7.3. The Big Conversation

For example, in our Faculty of Education, where students are off campus on placement for significant periods, we initiated the 'Big Conversation': 'a constant temperature check' on key themes throughout the year. Questions are developed by staff and students every 2 weeks and take a 'one click' approach, gathering quick responses to live issues. Questions are 'ever-present' in the VLE and discussed in teaching sessions. 60% of students regularly engage, '*as they know action will be taken to improve ...*' on a fortnightly basis. ⁴⁷

7.4. Student Advisers

Despite our many mechanisms to engage students, some voices are at risk of being less prominent. We have therefore developed **Student Advisory Panels** to represent our key Widening Participation students: Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic; Care Experienced and Estranged; Disabled; First Generation; and Mature. Panels were established to develop networks for students from underrepresented groups and provide a regular forum where students' lived experiences are heard so we can continue to align services, policies and initiatives to student need. Members were surveyed before and after Panels, showing a significant positive impact across all metrics:

- *How connected do you feel to the University staff at Edge Hill?* 27% increase
- *To what extent do you agree 'the University listens to my views?'* 30% increase
- *Overall, how much do you feel part of the Edge Hill community?* 35% increase ⁴⁸

Our approach has been commended by the Office for Students' Student Engagement Team who sought our insights when refreshing their own Student Engagement Strategy. The initiative was also used as a best practice example in the recent UUK #ClosingTheGap Report.⁴⁹ More important however, was the impact on students. '*I feel listened to, I feel comfortable and supported by my peers and the University. I feel like I can be honest, and my voice makes a difference.*' [SE7]

We are keen for students to recognise the difference they can make through engagement, so we employ a cohort of students – **Campus Connectors** - to support this work. This team of student-staff play a vital role in encouraging students to maximise their time at university. They help

students to settle in and make friends, deliver an engaging year-round programme of activity and signpost students to support as needed. Beyond resident students, the Connectors run free commuter breakfasts badged as '*Grab a Coffee and Get Connected*.' Such engagement activities are popular, with 3600 breakfasts served between October-December 2022. We couple them with a presence from key support services and employability contacts given that commuter students are 3.5% less likely to be retained. [SO1, SO2, SE5, SE7]

8. Positive Outcomes & Educational Gains

Everything we do: our academic experience, our support services, our resource investment is driven by a desire to deliver an outstanding student experience and positive outcomes for all. This is brought together for holistic consideration through our quality assurance processes which have a strong focus on the student experience and outcomes. To support this we have embedded the *Tableau Management Information System* to provide both real time data (e.g. on student attendance) and underpin our Annual Monitoring and Review process.

8.1. Evidence-Based Interventions

Our bespoke dashboard combines a range of metrics, including all TEF metrics, for each academic department; this forms the basis of discussion during our Monitoring meetings and every department produces an Annual Action Plan, responding to their own data. We also have a bespoke Access & Participation Dashboard for each department so they can see any gaps in performance by student characteristics. This contributes to our above benchmark performance in respect of student characteristics on both continuation and completion. [SO1, SO2].

8.2. Data in Context

Our outstanding levels of continuation and completion clearly demonstrate our strength in supporting a diverse student body. In respect of our progression data, we are marginally below the high benchmark of 70.4% at 68.5%. In considering this there is important mitigating context.

We have almost twice as many students from deprived backgrounds as the average OfS registered provider (29.3% come from the lowest quintile for deprivation compared to a sector average of 15.6%). Further, our student body is approximately 70% female, many of whom are mature and have caring responsibilities.⁵⁰

A particular challenge is lack of geographical mobility: 75% of our graduates stay in the region.⁵¹ Whilst for some this is by choice, for others it is due to the lack of finance: relocation to areas with more buoyant graduate labour markets is simply financially prohibitive. This lack of mobility creates practical challenges as the North West region has the lowest highly skilled employment rate across England (69.7%); in contrast the North East has a rate of 75.8%.⁵² This challenge was disproportionately exacerbated by the pandemic, when unemployment rates in the North were significantly higher than in the rest of England (6.3% compared to 5.3%, one fifth higher in relative terms).⁵³ To compound this challenge, within the North West, and particularly within the sub-region we occupy, public transport links are very poor, creating hidden disadvantage which cannot be reflected in the data.

Disaggregating the 3 years of the metrics, the pandemic impact is very evident. Pre-pandemic we were making good progress, being broadly in line with benchmark in 2019 (-0.8%); in 2020 however, we saw a major deterioration to -3.2% due to the pandemic; we worked hard with our

students and saw some substantial recovery in 2021 (-1.3%) and we expect to see further improvement in 2022 data.

In 'normal times', whilst it is difficult to address all of the geographical and social disadvantages that our students face, we know that issues around confidence and aspiration also hold them back. A key part of our role is about seeking to address the inequalities inherent in socio-economic disadvantage by supporting students to gain the skills and confidence to aspire beyond graduation and to compete against more advantaged peers.

8.3. Recognition of Excellence

Given the focus we place on supporting employability, we are confident in our approach. We have several indicators that our efforts during this period are delivering positive outcomes, as commended by third parties and our students:

- 2022 – Winner, AGCAS Equality, Diversity & Inclusivity Award ⁵⁴
- 2021 – Finalist, Target Jobs, Best University Employability Strategy ⁵⁵
- 2020 – Finalist, What Uni Student Choice Award, Job Prospects. ⁵⁶

The last of the above is particularly pleasing as it represents actual student votes. This chimes with the results we achieve in the 'Graduate Voice' responses to the Graduate Outcomes Survey. In this, **90% of students report that they consider their current activity to be meaningful** and **80% report that they are on track to achieve their career ambitions.** ⁵⁷[SO3, SO4]. Our Careers Team, working in close partnership with academic departments, has continued to focus on a range of initiatives to support delivery of our well-established Employability Strategy and, as above, we are confident that we will see continued progress on this measure as a result.

8.4. Employability Strategy ⁵⁸

Our Employability Strategy guides operational delivery and recognises the importance of positive outcomes for both individuals and the wider economy. For us, university should be personally transformative, and developing students' employability is an essential part of learning: 87% of our students expect to find graduate-level paid work when they graduate⁵⁹ so supporting students realise their aims is key; our Strategy is therefore embedded across the student journey, designed to ensure our students achieve positive outcomes. The Strategy has foundational pillars which enable students to:

- Know employers and the employability skills they want (**our Graduate Attributes**)
- Know their own employability strengths and have the chance to practice and hone them (delivered through our institutional **ePortfolio PebblePad** detailed below)
- Know how to present as a compelling candidate.

8.5. Career Readiness & Goals

To deliver on our Strategy, we make intelligent use of data and insights. To help students 'know' their employability skills and strengths, we operate a University-wide Career Readiness approach. At enrolment and re-enrolment, every student is asked questions relating to their individual stage of Career Readiness and associated support needs. Each response is coded and aligns to the following stages of career readiness:

- **Discover:** exploring careers ideas and opportunities
- **Develop:** enhancing skills through experience
- **Compete:** getting ready to secure the next steps in their career journey

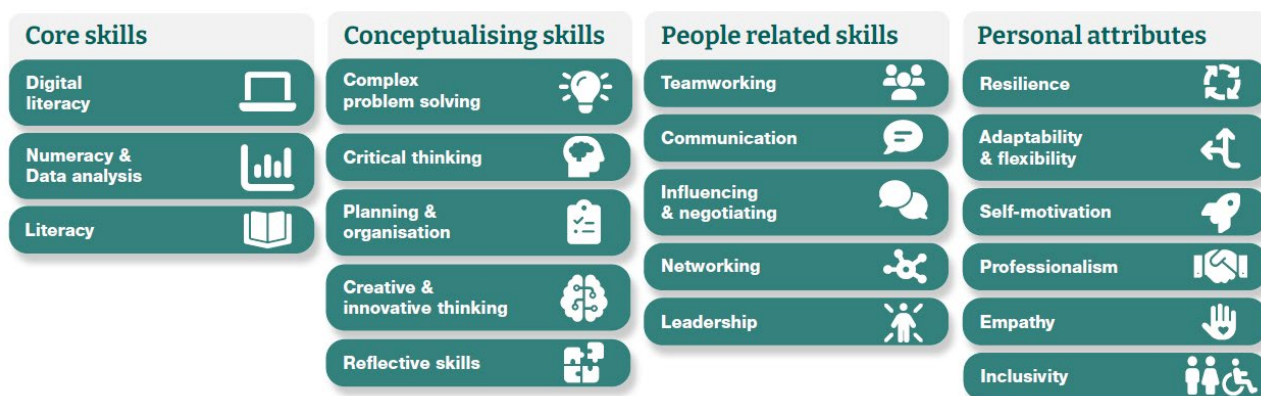
This vast data set (over 10,000 responses in 2022⁶⁰) is analysed and shared across the University. The results inform a tailored response, shaping content and communications so students receive support to help them progress in their Career Readiness. Specifically, our Careers Service sends a regular Newsletter on initiatives and opportunities to support employability. These are targeted, depending on the stage of readiness a student has declared. In the spirit of continuous improvement, we monitor Newsletter open rates to understand the level of effectiveness and engagement with the approach and where we need to build. **Personal Tutors** also have a key role to play and they use the information on Career Readiness to inform supportive conversations about what tutees aspire to after University, and how we can support them. [SE7, SO1]

In the first year of using the Career Readiness method, we found many of our final year students did not perceive themselves to be at the **Compete stage**. To better understand this, we introduced a new question asking students to detail their **career goal**, which we believe to be unique practice. This data shows that the majority of our students have a clear idea about what they want to do, but often don't know how to get started. Early access to this qualitative data enables us to tailor our support based on individual need. For example, our qualified Careers Advisers use this data to personalise career options sessions with students at all levels of study. Careers Advisers are an integral part of academic delivery, teaching on every single programme and provide information, advice and guidance to students via the curriculum. Each Careers Adviser has responsibility for a different caseload of academic departments and has expertise in that subject area, so sessions are subject-related.

In 2021/22 Careers Advisers delivered over 7000 curriculum inputs in academic departments; post-pandemic we have heightened engagement with this agenda and this year to date, Careers have already delivered almost 7000 inputs to the curriculum in a single semester⁶¹, showing exponential growth in this collaborative approach. Meeting students where they are - during teaching and learning sessions - means students can consider career choices during study, not separate from it [SE5, SE7, SO1, SO3]

8.6. Responding to Employer Needs – the Graduate Attributes ⁶²

Our Graduate Attributes were developed in partnership with students, the SU and employers. The attributes are organised into four sub-groups and align to what employers want. Each attribute has a definition to ensure consistency across the institution. Examples of evidence give students practical illustrations of how they can demonstrate competence and confidence in the attributes. These Graduate Attributes also form the basis of our educational gains.



Our Graduate Attributes are embedded across the curriculum via the Taught Degrees Framework and mapped against our extra-curricular activities via our Student Life Portal. This enables students to select both modules and activities based on different Graduate Attributes they need to develop. The Students' Union also map their core activity to our Graduate Attributes for example highlighting skills developed through roles such as being a student representative or participation in clubs and societies. [SO1, SO4, SO5].

We maintain close links with employers, ensuring we remain alert to their needs, both generically and at individual subject level. The majority of programmes have **professional accreditation**, ensuring students not only gain their qualification but also gain discipline specific recognition, as valued by employers. Every academic department has an **Employer Advisory Panel** to advise on matters such as curriculum development, as well as lending support with placements and recruitment processes such as mock interviews. Our **in-house Employability Conferences**, both institutional (covering topics such as Entrepreneurship, Developing LinkedIn Profiles, as well as CV/Application workshops etc) and at academic department level, are supported by employers who cover sector-specific matters and alumni who talk about their own journey. Our extensive **partnerships with over 1600** health providers, educational settings, and businesses as well as high profile relationships with organisations such as Tate Liverpool and Everton Football Club, provide rich insights into how we can best prepare our students to compete in the labour market. [SE3, SO1, SO3]

8.7. Self-Reflection and Evidencing the Graduate Attributes

In reflecting on their Attributes, it is important that students can both identify gaps and document practical examples to evidence their skills. To support the former, we have embedded a self-reflective approach into our employability work via use of our **Skills and Personal Reflective Activity 'SaPRA' tool**, launched in 2014. The tool, developed by our Head of Careers and Employability, asks students to reflect on their levels of confidence in a range of different skills. It has now been developed into a Graduate Attributes workbook, hosted on **our ePortfolio platform, PebblePad**. This allows students to reflect on their levels of confidence in each of the Graduate Attributes using PebblePad which stores responses. Students draw evidence from both their studies (Module Handbooks and assessment briefs identify which Graduate Attributes are evidenced within them), and from the extra-curricular activity in which they are involved. **Personal Tutors use the PebblePad** workbook to structure their meetings with students, giving feedback on the evidence provided and helping tutees develop an action plan to fill any gaps. This is an iterative process, actively engaging students in reflection, action and evidence. [SO1, SO4, SO5, SO6, SE7].

Our approach has been highlighted as **good practice**. A recent webinar delivered by the Head of Careers and Employability attracted over 300 registrations.⁶³ As a result, we are now supporting Kings University, Canada to adopt our approach and our Graduate Attributes workbook template is available to all PebblePad users to encourage take up across the Sector.

An example of the approach working in practice is in the role of the Digital Interns. In week 1 of their internship, students undertook a skills audit, rating their confidence against a number of Attributes including time management and adaptive thinking. At the end of the internship **students reported being 100% confident in these skills**. *"A really rewarding Internship where I made new connections, inherited important digital skills and created a huge impact for the future learners."*⁶⁴

8.8. Making Employability Support Visible - Careers Corner

Our approach to Employability and Positive Outcomes is one of continuous enhancement; we are always looking for new ways to engage with our students. In that vein, in the Catalyst, by the entrance, you will find 'Careers Corner', a highly visible drop-in service which has led to a 51% increase in engagement in October 2022 compared to October 2021⁶⁵. Careers Corner provides support for quick careers queries, as well as small group workshops and 20-minute 'Getting started with...' appointments focusing on a range of careers topics such as making effective applications and applying for postgraduate study. These sessions and interactions increase the confidence of our students in making applications and aspiring to graduate level roles but they also encourage them to engage more broadly with the breadth of support on offer from our Careers Service: in 2021/22 we saw just over 4000 student-initiated engagements with Careers; in this year to date we have already seen 2673, making it likely that we will far exceed last year's level.⁶⁶ Of those who have used the Careers Services, **94% would recommend it to a friend.**⁶⁷ [SE1, SO1]

8.9. Confidence and Aspiration Building

A key part of our work to support students achieve their career goals is confidence and aspiration building. Whilst our employability activity is fully embedded, some students require tailored approaches to boost confidence and nurture ambition. To respond to this we are part of the **innovative RE:ACTION 24/7 programme**,⁶⁸ a collaboration between Business and Universities. The programme supports 3,000 students from low socio-economic groups, providing training, reflection sessions and inspiring role models. The partnership provides tangible benefits and increased the overall confidence of participants by 143%. In 2022, it won the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services award for **Excellence in Inclusivity and Diversity** [SO1, SO3]. Access to relatable role models is particularly important in building confidence especially on programmes where the career path may be less defined. Our '**Visualising Success**' initiative developed 120 case studies of recent Edge Hill students who have achieved great things in their careers. Case studies are displayed and used in academic departments so students can see what peers from similar backgrounds have achieved.

9. Educational Gains – Embedded from First Enrolment to Graduation and Beyond

As we have shown, our students come from a diverse range of backgrounds, but a high percentage come from areas of high deprivation or from families with no prior experience of higher education. We believe education should be transformational and improve life chances. This is deeply embedded into our mission and values and we have a clear focus on adding value beyond the qualification: we support our graduates to develop a range of skills, capabilities, attitudes and experiences that will enable them to compete with those who may have had more opportunities to develop these assets, as well as have the social capital that will place them at a greater advantage in the jobs market.

For us, educational gain is not a distinct activity; it is an integral part of the way we support students and deliberately design our provision, across both our academic and extra-curricular offer, to systematically enable students, at multiple opportunities, to not only develop these capabilities but to document them and to be confident in articulating them.

The **cornerstone of our educational gains is our Graduate Attributes Framework** as referenced throughout. These articulate our vision of 'the Edge Hill Graduate', leaving University

not only with their qualification but with a wealth of skills and capabilities for life. As can be seen, the attributes address the whole person, including 'hard skills' such as complex problem solving, critical thinking, planning and organising; and soft skills such as teamwork, communication and influencing plus personal attributes such as resilience, flexibility and empathy. These have been specifically designed in the light of employer wants, to support students in their future career ambitions. [SO4]. These are augmented by a range of academic skills such as academic writing, research and referencing skills which students are supported to develop throughout their studies, specifically preparing them for further study if that is their plan.

These Graduate Attributes are embedded into our provision, both academic and extra-curricular: in terms of the curriculum, this has been achieved through our Taught Degrees Framework which expects them to be mapped; in terms of extra-curricular activity, the Graduate Attributes are mapped across our entire offer so students can see how engaging with extra-curricular activity will help them, not only to be more engaged in University life, but also to develop key capabilities valued by employers. [SO4, SO5].

In practical terms, students are supported in a range of ways but Personal Tutors are central: they focus on how students are developing and documenting the attributes through tutee meetings and students document the evidence of their skills in the Graduate Attributes workbook.[SO5] This means students leave with a portfolio of evidence against these attributes that can be used to demonstrate their work readiness in job applications or for further study. Preparedness for the world of work is also supported by our approach to teaching, learning and assessment. The former makes extensive use of simulation and industry standard facilities; the latter routinely uses authentic assessment: both mirror real-life experiences making learning practical and relevant. [SO6]

As well as equipping students for life beyond university, our mapping encourages students to participate in university life, trying new things to hone their Graduate Attributes. This makes student life more rewarding, in our view, contributing to positive student outcomes. *'The approach to PDP is sector leading. I have never seen a better expression of the value of academic work alongside personal development and employability.'* ⁶⁹

10. Conclusion

We hope we have provided some insight into the outstanding experience and outcomes we aim to deliver. We are passionate about the transformational potential of education, not only for the life chances of our students but for their families and the communities in which they live. We seek to provide an environment where all students, whatever their background, can find their place and thrive: a place where they will be stretched, challenged and supported in equal measure so when they graduate, they are rightly proud of their achievements and confident in their preparedness for their next steps whatever they may be.

If you were an Edge Hill University student, we would do this by ensuring:

- a highly personalised experience from induction to graduation, supported by staff who are motivated by a desire for you to achieve your potential (Getting to Know You Survey, Career Readiness Survey, Personal Tuition, Taught Degrees Framework).
- that we take account of your prior experiences, as well as your fears and aspirations both at university and beyond. (Getting to Know You and Career Readiness Surveys).

- an engaging and coherent curriculum, informed by research, scholarship and practice, delivered by passionate and inspiring academics. (Taught Degrees Framework, Academic Development Support, VLE Baseline).
- a high-quality living environment, in a beautiful setting, with thoughtfully designed learning spaces to support real-world experience (investment in Campus development including bespoke learning spaces supporting simulation)
- varied and inclusive assessment practices which enable you to demonstrate your skills and knowledge in a range of ways whilst learning for the future (Taught Degrees Framework and Assessment Policy).
- proactive academic and personal tuition which supports you to stay on track and encourages you to develop your skills and attributes for the next steps. (Personal Tuition, Early Intervention, Graduate Attributes, SaPRA)
- access to a wealth of life-enhancing opportunities and outstanding specialist support to help navigate the barriers life might present. (Student Opportunity Fund, Wellbeing, Financial, Careers and Academic Skills support).
- the chance to recognise and celebrate the value of university beyond the new letters behind your name: to be proud of how you have grown and the many skills and attributes you have developed along the way. (Taught Degrees Framework, Student Opportunity Fund, Graduates Attributes, PebblePad).

*'Edge Hill University, which is unmistakeably student-centred and concerned about its impact on individuals.'*⁷⁰

11. **References**

- ¹ www.edgehill.ac.uk/edge-hill-crowned-modern-university-of-the-year/
- ² The Times & Sunday Times Good University Guide 2018
- ³ www.educatenorth.co.uk/2020-winners/
- ⁴ www.educatenorth.co.uk/2022-winners/
- ⁵ www.whatuni.com/student-awards-winners/university-of-the-year/
- ⁶ www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2022/young-university-rankings
- ⁷ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/2023/>
- ⁸ www.edgehill.ac.uk/edge-hill-crowned-modern-university-of-the-year/
- ⁹ APP Financial Return - 10937 UG students in 2021/22. WP defined as POLAR4 = 1,2 or IMD=1-4 or age on 31/08/21 >= 21 or have a declared disability or ethnicity is declared and is not 'White' or declared as 'Care leaver'
- ¹⁰ All 3 bullet points from OfS Size and Shape Data –38,970 FTUG students over 4 years (2017/18-2020/21)
- ¹¹ Internal 2021/22 Enrolments dashboard. From 3,219 FTUG entrants with known data
- ¹² Internal - Evaluation data from a sample of 45 student mentors, employment data from 115 participants in last two academic years
- ¹³ Internal - GMC Report – Stage 5 visit to Edge Hill University Medical School, July 2019
- ¹⁴ Internal - 'Getting to Know You Survey' – Sept 2022. 1,895 respondents of 3,438 UG students
- ¹⁵ Internal – Framework last submitted to Student Experience Sub-Committee in Jan 2022
- ¹⁶ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-information-and-data/national-student-survey-nss/nss-data-provider-level/> all NSS 2022 data is from this source (using England only & excluding specialist HEIs. 2072 responses)
- ¹⁷ Internal data – 1038 staff respondents who have completed Mental Health Awareness Training since it was introduced
- ¹⁸ Internal Mid-Course Student Voice Survey 2021/22 & 2022/23 combined – 4234 responses
- ¹⁹ [University Teaching and Student Services: Covid-19 - Hansard - UK Parliament](#) 12 Oct 2020
- ²⁰ From this point onwards we refer to FTUG TEF data given it is our predominant provision
- ²¹ Internal document on Centre for Learning & Teaching wiki page
- ²² Internal – Oct 2022 Induction Survey. 380 responses representing a 9% response rate
- ²³ Internal – Presentation to Board of Governors 2018-2021 Overview – Jan 2021
- ²⁴ Internal data drawn from HESA return plus numbers engaged in CPD scheme & PGCert HE
- ²⁵ Internal - Advance HE Annual Review of EHU CPD Scheme 2021-22
- ²⁶ www.advance-he.ac.uk/cate-team/collaboration-between-academic-quality-and-development-unit-and-centre-learning-and
- ²⁷ External Examiner Report for BA (HONS) Children & Young People's Learning and Development (Primary) (2020-21)
- ²⁸ From 13,844 students in 2019/20 & 15,204 students in 2020/21 (all modes & levels of study)
- ²⁹ [Global Teaching Excellence Award | Advance HE \(advance-he.ac.uk\)](#) & GTEA Feedback
- ³⁰ www.whatuni.com/student-awards-winners/facilities/
- ³¹ www.whatuni.com/student-awards-winners/university-halls/
- ³² Internal data - Average of Year 1 Retention Rates for FTUG Sep-Dec starters from 2018-2021
- ³³ www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/league-tables/rankings
- ³⁴ NSS 2022 Open Comments
- ³⁵ Internal data - 81,996 enquiries compared to 64,462
- ³⁶ [THE Awards 2020: shortlist announced | Times Higher Education \(THE\)](#)
- ³⁷ Internal data – 523 students in 2018/19 vs 1600 in 2020/21

- ³⁸ Internal data – From a sample of 19 students accessing support over a 2-week period in Nov 2022
- ³⁹ The Times & Sunday Times Good University Guide 2018
- ⁴⁰ Internal KPI data on students accessing Student Support Team, still enrolled as at 13 Jan 2023
- ⁴¹ Internal KPI data on staff referrals Sept-Dec 2021 vs Sept-Dec 2022 (56 vs 161)
- ⁴² Internal Withdrawals Update from 09/01/23 detailing FT UG in-year withdrawals
- ⁴³ <https://www.savethestudent.org/money/surveys/student-money-survey-2022-results.html>
- ⁴⁴ Internal data – 79 students who accessed support in 2020/21 representing a 22% response rate
- ⁴⁵ Internal data – sample of 24 students who accessed support
- ⁴⁶ Internal data – Responses from 174 students out of 1056 accessing support in 2020/21 & 2021/22
- ⁴⁷ Internal data – out of approx. 1400 UG FoE students. Internal Annual Monitoring Report Early Years 2020/21
- ⁴⁸ Internal Student Advisory Panels End of Year Report 2021/22. 72 student panel members - 50 members completed baseline survey, 40 completed final survey
- ⁴⁹ www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/features/closing-gap-three-years/what-works
- ⁵⁰ OfS Size and Shape Data from 38,970 full-time undergraduates (2017/18 – 2020/21)
- ⁵¹ HESA Graduate Outcomes 2017/18 – 2019/20: UK domiciled FT first degree leavers in UK employment
- ⁵² HESA Graduate Outcomes 2017/18 – 2019/20: percentage of UK domiciled full-time first degree leavers in highly skilled employment (of 3,276 with known SOC)
- ⁵³ [A-Year-of-COVID-in-the-North-report-2021.pdf \(thenhsa.co.uk\)](https://thenhsa.co.uk/A-Year-of-COVID-in-the-North-report-2021.pdf)
- ⁵⁴ www.agcas.org.uk/latest/the-agcas-equality-diversity-and-inclusivity-award-2022/
- ⁵⁵ [Shortlists 2021 | targetjobs Awards](#)
- ⁵⁶ [Best Universities 2020 | UK University Rankings by Whatuni](#)
- ⁵⁷ 2019-20 Graduate Outcomes Survey. Graduate Voice Questions - 1,240 responses from those in full-time employment and/or further study
- ⁵⁸ www.edgehill.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/documents/employability-strategy.pdf
- ⁵⁹ Internal - Getting to Know You Survey 2022
- ⁶⁰ Internal Career Readiness and Career Goal data. Respondents = all UG students
- ⁶¹ Internal - Careers Team Monthly Report: December 2022
- ⁶² <https://www.edgehill.ac.uk/document/graduates-attributes-glossary/>
- ⁶³ [Boosting Employability with Edge Hill - Webinar \(pebblepad.co.uk\)](#) – 2 November 2022
- ⁶⁴ Internal Digital Student Internship Evaluation Report 2021. Of 40 student interns 26 completed evaluation
- ⁶⁵ Internal - Careers Team Monthly Report: October 2022
- ⁶⁶ Internal - Careers Team Monthly Report: December 2022
- ⁶⁷ Careers Student Feedback Report – Semester 1 2022/23 – 94% of a sample of 170 students
- ⁶⁸ [RE: Action 24/7 | TG Consulting \(tgconsultingltd.co.uk\)](#)
- ⁶⁹ External Examiner Report for BA (Hons) Film Studies with Film Production & BA (Hons) Film Studies – Annual Monitoring Report – Media 2019/20
- ⁷⁰ [Going for Gold: Lessons from the TEF provider submissions - HEPI](#) – page 50