

Arts University Plymouth: Submission for TEF 2023

1. PROVIDER CONTEXT

Educational mission and strategic aims

1.1 As the top small or specialist university for student satisfaction (NSS 2022) Arts University Plymouth (AUP) is setting a vision towards 2030 through its new strategic plan *AUP 2030: Creative Education for a Changing World*. This vision is based upon sustainable growth, solution focussed teaching and research, and a commitment to impactful social justice and ecological change through its people, culture and place. This ensures that our work is energised and designed to meet the ambitions of students and staff while acknowledging the shifting realm of creativity through new technologies and the workplaces of tomorrow. Built upon three pillars, *Creative Endeavour*, *Sustainable Futures*, and *People & Place*, the AUP 2030 plan re-energises the 2018-23 strategic focus on creative pedagogy and social justice.

1.2 Our vision for AUP is a new kind of **art school for the 21st century**, preparing graduates who are uniquely placed to provide creative solutions to the complex global challenges of our times. We champion our people, place and pedagogy at the heart of our mission, delivering sustainable growth and impactful change in terms of creative economies, civic engagement and cultural ambition in Plymouth and the wider region. AUP will become widely regarded as a catalyst for individual, societal and ecological transformation, delivering innovative and distinctive learning, teaching and research through its interdisciplinary ecosystem of materials, processes, technologies and knowledge exchange.

There is something really special here. It's something you sign up for when you walk through the doors. You get into the building, you're surrounded by the people and you know that you're all here for the same thing. This is the only place where I've felt part of something bigger - it's a place where I do believe to my core that the staff get it too. Social Justice, Equality, Creatives and Power - these aren't ideals. They're the framework of the very building.

Student Union President 2023

Background information and context

1.3 Founded as Plymouth Drawing School in 1856, AUP is an **independent specialist provider** of further and higher creative education in art, design and media. With 166 years of history in the city of Plymouth, AUP has more recently been through a period of rapid transformational growth. The move to become Arts University Plymouth came after the institution, which had already delivered Higher Education (HE) for over 20 years, received Taught Degree Awarding Powers in 2019 and was subsequently awarded University Title in 2022. With 1,500 students across our FE and HE provision and a dedicated academic and technical staff headcount of 137 alongside 175 professional services staff, our scale gives us the opportunity to teach students in a close supportive environment and vibrant creative community at AUP.

Student Backgrounds

1.4 Our creative undergraduate cohorts are rich in backgrounds from **widening participation** categories; HESA data show consistently high proportions of young entrants from Low Participation Neighbourhoods, entrants eligible for DSA, and mature entrants, and this remains the case in most recent published data for academic year 2020/21. This has meant a consistent focus on these three main categories of student characteristics to target improved comparative outcomes in Access and Participation Plans. HESA data for the academic year 2020/21 shows:

- 19% of our UK domiciled young full-time undergraduate entrants came from Low Participation Neighbourhoods (in the top 10% of HE providers)
- 16% of our entrants were eligible for DSA (in the top 5% of HE providers)
- 31% of our UK domiciled entrants were mature (in the top 30% of HE providers) of which 16% had no previous HE experience and were from low participation neighbourhoods (in the top 15% of HE providers)

1.5 For academic year 2020/21, approximately three-quarters of our undergraduate full-time cohort comprised students who were either mature on entry, young from low participation neighbourhoods, students with disabilities, or students from deprived areas. The proportion of all students across all years who declare a disability has remained high, even in comparison to some other specialist arts universities, at an average of 39% over the past 10 years, with increasing proportions of students who have declared a mental health condition, specific learning difficulty, or social communication/autistic spectrum disorder, (most recently c. 30%). It is also evident that over the last 3-4 years the complexity of mental health conditions has been increasing.

1.6 There remains a **strong regional presence** (Devon and Cornwall) in our cohorts; HESA published data shows this has moved from 72% in 2014/15 to 64% in 2020/21 (across the majority of the years relating to the TEF) with increasing recruitment from outside the region. This has been supported by progression into HE from our own FE provision, which makes up typically 17-20% of the undergraduate population. Our undergraduate cohort is predominantly female, increasing from c. 62% female in 2014/15 to 73% in 2020/21. Whilst 10% higher compared to HESA data for design and creative and performing arts as a whole (63%, 2020-21), this is not atypical for specialist arts universities.

1.7 Our relatively **high proportions of mature students** are supported by the offer of entry to HE through an extended 4-year pathway for all current undergraduate courses. With a typical entry of c. 40 students over the past five years, students enrol into a specific named course, but with a largely common initial Level 0 year. This is attractive for mature students without standard entry qualifications but with good portfolios and the potential to develop their academic competency through Levels 4 to 6. Typically around 45% of our mature students are over the age of 30 and we also support entry for those with the qualifications and skills directly into BA Year 1 (and Levels 5/6 and full or part-time as appropriate).

1.8. The data team has developed a number of tools to enable staff to support students through **data-driven student support**. A comprehensive suite of dashboards track all aspects of our students' academic progress and welfare. As well as highlighting general areas of excellence or where attention is needed, they also give staff an early warning where a student might need further support, or when they aren't taking full advantage of the support available, so that they can

intervene if necessary. In addition to the dashboards, a bespoke interface called SOMIS has been built not only to streamline access to our student record system, but also to help our staff support our students more effectively. In the last year, for example, our Student Support team accessed pages 90,000 times, including logging details of conversations with students and decisions made, recording confidential records from counselling sessions, managing safeguarding issues, maintaining DSA and reasonable adjustment details, as well as reporting and monitoring data for use in University governance and continual improvement processes.

Employability

1.9 With regard to our employability agenda, the QAA TDAP Scrutiny Report (November 2018) noted a significant reorientation of our approach and an ambitious Strategic Plan (2018-23) that included the development of the 'continuum' concept, (from our Young Arts Clubs to our Pre Degree courses and on to our higher education provisions), links with regional industries, local business and arts organisations to establish work experience, live briefs and commissions and industry talks. We recognise that creative arts graduates can often be self-employed, taking often low-paid work to support their emerging studio practice and career development within the creative industries. We prepare our graduates with a **real confidence in their abilities** to enter the job market or to work as entrepreneurs, through a deep relationship to their creative discipline, a resilience to creative risk and an ability to work across boundaries. This is achieved through our unified structure of student-facing professional service teams which brings together academic, learning technology and career development specialists. Working with students and graduates, our **Learning Lab** team delivers one-to-one, group and targeted careers support. This includes alumni and industry mentoring for final year students, employability 'enrichment' weeks to kick-start student careers, mock interviews, online employability symposia which bring together students and graduates and live briefs giving students real-world experience working directly with industry. We expand on graduate outcomes and our careers and employability work in SO3.

The industry experiences, visits, and trips provided are immensely beneficial, as well as being a fun and immersive way of working towards real-life briefs,... They completely nurture your talent, style and professional skills in a supportive and creative way. I really felt so supported the entire 3 years of the course.

NSS comment, Year 3 BA
Commercial Photography
student

1.10 In the past five years, AUP has strengthened its collaborations and employability links within the city and region, developing **strategic partnerships** with a range of organisations including: Plymouth City Council, University of Plymouth, Plymouth Marjon University, The Box Plymouth, Real Ideas and Theatre Royal Plymouth; and through affiliation with the South West Business Council, Plymouth Area Business Council, Plymouth Growth Board, Plymouth Arts Cinema, Millfields Trust and Makers HQ. Regional and city relationships have developed in the last 12 months through the Vice-Chancellor's membership of the Plymouth Growth Board, the private sector led partnership leading city economic regeneration. Connecting with a citywide place-making agenda, the University has placed the aspirations and support needs of every student at the very heart of its creative enterprise, sharing the city's aspiration to create a vibrant cultural scene for graduate employment.

Curriculum Development

1.11 Following the award of TDAP in 2019, the University set out to create an innovative and student-centered curriculum to reflect the needs of a 21st century specialist creative education in the arts. Validated in 2020, the **Common Unit Framework** (CUF) supports holistic and interdisciplinary learning of HE subjects aligned to art, design and media, providing the framework for revalidating all undergraduate awards at AUP the following year. Learning, teaching and assessment and its structural design were co-developed through academic, professional services and student consultation to form an integrated approach, while critically reviewing the content and pedagogy of all undergraduate courses. The framework is therefore an inclusive curriculum that recognises and encourages diversity in the student population; that supports progression through levels of learning in line with FHEQ level outcomes; provides all students with the opportunity to develop their skills as critically informed creative practitioners; produces high-quality learning that reflects current knowledge in the field of enquiry and promotes a deeper connection with global contexts.

“All revalidated courses...have demonstrated rigour and ambition in the development of academic awards within the Common Unit Framework, producing a rich and engaging student-focussed experience.”

Common Unit Framework Validation Panel (Design) 2021

“There is a definite collegiate approach...and imaginative engagement with the CUF that have created exciting opportunities for students”

Common Unit Framework Validation Panel (Arts + Media) 2021

Sections SE1 and SO4 will expand on the impact of the CUF and its role in educational gain and student outcomes.

Student contribution to this submission

1.12 The Students' Union President, together with the University Registrar, met with a group of students across all levels of study to discuss the student submission to the TEF. After consideration the students agreed that rather than submitting a separate submission they would contribute to the main document, providing additional quotes and text while it was in development. These populate the document in quotation boxes and, with alumni input, inform the narrative and provide their perspectives and experience of studying at AUP.

2. STUDENT EXPERIENCE

SE1. Outstanding teaching, assessment and feedback

2.1 Mapped through the Common Unit Framework, our three key aspects of learning - core, co- and extracurricular activity provide the framework for student achievement across all undergraduate courses at AUP. Whilst the core undergraduate curriculum comprises 1,200 hours of learning per academic year, there are an additional 270 optional hours per year of co-curricular technical / academic enrichment and workshop activity aligned to the core curriculum themes. This learning, teaching and assessment approach delivers a **rich and broad portfolio** which offers flexibility in practice, whilst ensuring core and essential learning to support successful graduate outcomes. Graduate Attributes, Digital Literacy and Employability Skills are embedded into

curriculum delivery and assessment strategies alongside an integrated approach for the development of academic and information literacy. With unit outcomes comprising taught, assessed and practised dimensions, assessment is mapped to a specific CUF outcome and is assessed multiple times throughout the course of study unless it is highly specific. This approach supports effective assessment whilst ensuring that students meet the requirements of the QAA Benchmarks.

2.2 Assessment is an integral part of the CUF and the overall approach taken is to ensure that it is dialogical, impactful and meaningful. Formative and summative assessments are built into the core structure of the CUF and drawing from the work of (Biggs, 2012 pp. 39–55) assessments are constructively aligned to learning outcomes and, where appropriate, the summative assessment for some units comprise one or more elements to ensure that the assessment supports student development. At AUP, and resonating with the research on effective assessment practice, the following model is used throughout each unit (Fig 1):

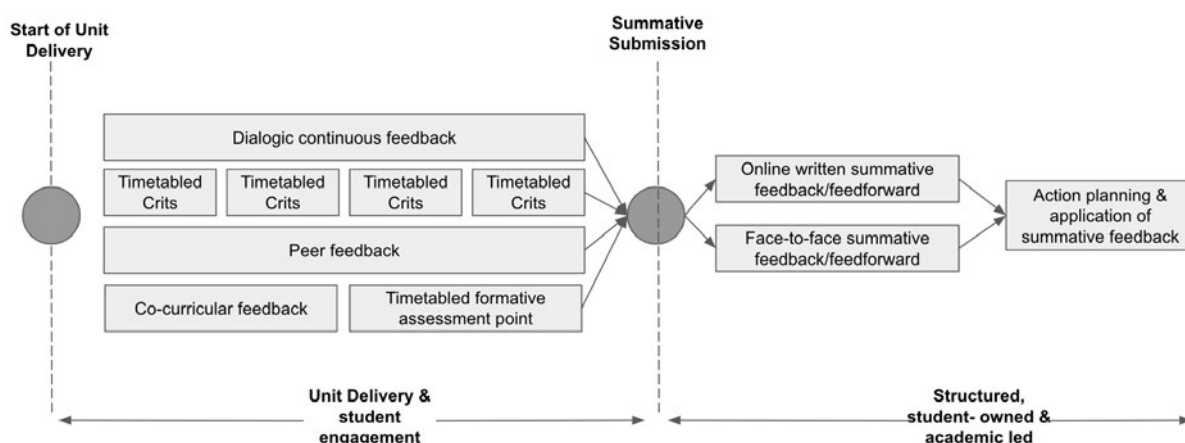


Figure 1: Integration of assessment into delivery. Assessment, feedback and feedforward into the design and delivery of the curriculum to help ensure that assessment is impactful, meaningful and supports learning.

For parity across AUP, assessors all work to the same assessment feedback framework, ensuring that we clearly indicate:

- A grading band for each learning outcome.
- Submission strengths to be celebrated, identifying areas of good practice for future work.
- How the grade was derived using the grading matrix, providing written feedback based on unit learning outcomes and assessment tasks/deliverables.
- Actions to consider for future work, making reference where appropriate to future units whereby the completion of these actions will support attainment.

2.3 Our commitment to outstanding teaching, assessment and feedback is reflected in this innovative framework, which has significantly strengthened learning, teaching and assessment practice for the University, and is an example of excellence in innovative pedagogical development designed to challenge, stimulate and support our students through the teaching on our courses:

“The key aspect of good practice raised in the Module Award Board reports was the introduction of the new Common Unit Framework (CUF).. The work viewed during my visit of the demonstration modules where (it) has been introduced was impressive.”
Chief External Examiner Report 2022

The opportunity of the CUF represents the latest part of the rapid trajectory that AUP has followed since the award of HEP status in 2014, and the strengthening of our learning and teaching offer to students has been built on a 20 year experience of delivering our HE awards. The evolution in pedagogy and student experience has been rapid since the award of TDAP in 2019, confirmed by the continuing improvement in NSS below.

2.4 Outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment outcomes are reflected in our 2022 NSS results, all of which show an increase of between 5-9% over the last four years: *'staff are good at explaining things'* (91%); *'staff have made the subject interesting'* (87%); *the course is intellectually stimulating* (80%); and *'my course has challenged me to achieve my best work'* (82%).

2.5 Comparing the 2019 with 2022 NSS results shows that student satisfaction across our provision has increased in nine of the ten NSS categories:

	2019	2022	Difference
The teaching on my course	78	85	+7%
Learning opportunities	82	85	+3%
Assessment and feedback	77	87	+10%
Academic support	76	83	+7%
Organisation and management	63	76	+13%
Learning resources	80	82	+2%
Learning community	74	73	-1%
Student voice	72	75	+3%
SU	54	62	+8%
Overall satisfaction	73	81	+8%

SE2. Course content and delivery

2.6 Course content across AUP is based on the extensive professional knowledge base and industry-leading practice of our staff, who are also practising artists, designers and makers. Timetabled sessions comprise technical delivery, practical demonstration, individual and group tutorials, critiques, lectures (including visiting artists and industry professionals), group seminars, academic skills and careers workshops, delivered alongside independent study and open-access learning opportunities in our industry-standard resources.

2.7 Students' learning is supported throughout their course with personal and group tutorials, formative review, feedback, and summative assessment. Individual tutorials can be used to give formative feedback on progress towards an assignment, group critiques and tutorials can be used to discuss work in relation to a given project, combined with feedback from peers, tutors and visiting lecturers. In contrast to the national trend, AUP has consistently scored well in the NSS Assessment & Feedback range, with an outstanding score in 2022 at 18% above national average.

2.8 **Co-creation opportunities for student-led learning** are embedded within the creative curriculum, giving students agency in designing learning content and enhancement activities alongside staff. For example, BA Illustration staff and students first began to collaborate on The

Sitting in the first Assembly was special as I realised what a strong sense of community our course has.

Year 2 BA Illustration student, 2019

Assembly In 2018. All three cohorts gather together, the themes and content are designed between staff and students and industry professionals are invited to contribute with talks about their work. Usually delivered in the cinema on campus, during the pandemic The Assembly continued online and to date there have been a total of 37 events.

2.9 At the launch of each Unit of study students are introduced to the learning opportunities, campus-wide resources and reference material for research. The Unit brief, templated centrally and given discipline-specificity by course teams, clearly identifies the learning outcomes, aims and objectives of study and information on the

deliverable components required for assessment submission. This clarity has been recognised in improved NSS survey results in response to the question of *Assessment criteria being clear*, at 85% in 2022, improving 11% since 2019. Across AUP, teams maintain a consistent deadline of three weeks to assess, moderate and deliver grades and provide written feedback to students, resulting in a positive response from students to the question of *Timely feedback*, averaging 82% over the last three years, and significantly above benchmark in 2022 (92% compared to a benchmark of 70%).

Annual Monitoring

2.10 To support continued improvement of the **quality of our teaching and learning**, we undertake termly quality monitoring meetings between course teams and Registry staff and, since achieving TDAP in 2019, we have linked this more directly with the year-end annual monitoring process, improving the reflective summary reports and achieving greater focus on areas targeted for improvement. The resulting Annual Monitoring Reports (AMRs) provide a mechanism to assure the good 'health' of the course, to gather feedback and identify and implement actions. AMR meetings take place three times a year, designed to support the writing of the AMRs, the first is linked to induction, the second retention and achievement and the third continuation / progression. AMRs celebrate the achievements of students and alumni, staff research, CPD and professional achievements and they record course level enhancement activity and industry liaison. They are an opportunity for course level scrutiny of data (e.g. student attainment, attendance, and graduate outcomes surveys) and achievements against target setting (e.g. recruitment, retention) and include reflection and actions in response to feedback from students (internal surveys, NSS and Student Staff Feedback Meetings (SSFMs)) and external examiners and Unit reports.

"Overall, the standard of the Unit Reports was excellent with a comprehensive review of the performance of students, feedback from students, and a reflective analysis by staff of the unit delivery and actions points for unit enhancement."

Chief External Examiner Report 2022

2.11 Specific **NSS Action plans** are linked to the AMR, course teams are expected to address and define actions against mid to low scores and that action plan is then monitored throughout the next academic year. The impact of NSS action planning and the AMR process as a mechanism for course improvement can be seen through the journey our BA Costume Production course has taken from a very low NSS Overall score in 2019, up to to 65% in 2020, then to 80% in 2021 and finally to 92% in 2022. During those three years, while the team were supported to improve on

assessment, teaching and student support, Costume students excelled in working opportunities and collaborations with The Box, Theatre Craft, the Illuminate Festival and The Hatchling, a ground-breaking outdoor theatrical performance that premiered in Plymouth in September 2021 with an audience of over 30,000 people. For the performance industry, the impact of the global pandemic continued longer than most and has taken longer to recover, yet even during lockdowns of 2021, the Costume staff were still able to develop external collaborations with the Soapbox Theatre, adding puppet design into their skillbase.

SE3. Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

2.12 AUP's **Research, Innovation, Scholarship and Knowledge Exchange** ambitions reflect the University's aim to grow its staff research culture, a trajectory which began with HEP status in 2014. Following the award of University title in 2022 we are preparing for a future submission to the Research Excellence Framework, to further build on our RISA work with academic staff, through the provision of research time in support of research, scholarship or innovation. HE Academic staff will be returned to HESA as both teaching and research, qualifying for up to 4 days minimum and 12 days maximum (pro rata) per annum towards academic and/or pedagogic research. Teaching and research are equally valued as routes in the University, and staff research must demonstrate impact in their teaching to qualify for support.

2.13 Through Research, Innovation and Scholarly Activity (RISA), academic staff are encouraged to engage with the professional currency of their work; the nature and extent of each individual's RISA will vary depending on their interests and expertise, enhancing an individual's professional practice and standing. Staff undertake research and scholarship at regional, national and international levels, through the lens of the University's research groups:

- **Making Learning** is oriented towards new developments in arts and pedagogy, and transformational agency of creative learning,
- **Memory Site Artefact** focusses on globalisation, borders, migration, decolonisation, archives and materiality.
- **Making Futures**, a biennial conference and international event, explores contemporary craft and maker movements as 'change agents' in 21st-century society,

"Despite its size and research history, the College has developed international recognition for its work in particular subjects and in creative arts education more generally." TDAP Report 2018.

2.14 Linked to Making Futures, and an example of staff-student partnership, AUP designed and hosted an international glass blowing symposium **Melting Pot** in 2022, as part of the UK's national celebrations for the UN-designated International Year of Glass. *Melting Pot* brought together live-streamed hot-glass demonstrations and lectures, in person and remotely, with some of the most exciting artists working in glass today. Students and alumni participated in live talks and demonstrations streamed to Venice, Rietveld Academie and an international audience, and debated the sustainable future of hot glass practice.

2.15 As a founding associate of **Tate Exchange**, AUP invited students and staff across all levels of provision to lead activities at Tate Modern, staging three experimental, interactive events

2017-19:

- **Making Learning: Pop-Up School and Symposium:** exploring our radical and progressive continuum of creative learning and practice
- **Factory Settings:** ‘How does art make a difference to people’s lives and society?’
- **Propositions for Change:** debating borders & migration, creative education, gender & identity, and voices of activism.

Tate was a great opportunity for me. I enjoyed the whole experience, immersing myself in the installation’s planning and preparation...(it) changed my practice when looking into the involvement of the public.

Student participant in Tate Exchange 2019

In total, over 150 students participated in Tate Exchange, and the opportunity to engage with live and online audiences of over 11,000 people was impactful. As an external participant in all three of the events, fellow Tate Associate Dr. Penny Hay observed:

“The continuous point of reflection has been the relationship between creativity, learning and risk. Bringing a group of staff and students together in an iconic art institution to create an event over 3-4 days is a purposeful risk, in the process of both making art and making learning.”

2.16 In 2020, the Chief External Examiner complemented AUP’s “*strong ‘making’ ethos*” and the integration of professional practice modules, live projects, and excellent industry links that were highlighted across many external examiner comments as building student confidence.

2.17 **Knowledge Exchange** projects at AUP aim to seek impactful partners from both business and the local community; support AUP’s talent; and innovate with a focus on New & Creative Technologies / Immersive Futures. At the end of 2021, AUP received £200,000 funding from Research England (UKRI). Staff members were invited to create proposals for projects that share our expertise and engage with people outside academia to develop mutually beneficial collaborative partnerships, providing innovative solutions to real-world challenges. The aim of this work was to share AUP’s knowledge, including research, expertise and physical assets with non-academic communities. With the first four successful partnerships underway, as part of this funding the university has also received a further £193,000 for activity in 2022-23.

“ Incredible projects at Arts University Plymouth [have been] made possible by special Knowledge Exchange funding for smaller universities from Research England - wonderful to see real-world challenges addressed with creativity.”

Policy Manager for Places and Knowledge Exchange, GuildHE

2.18 AUP’s Projects and Partnerships team have significantly progressed our externally facing initiatives, developing our presence and profile in **European-funded partnership projects** such as Atlantic Creative Youth Hubs Project, Smart Citizens Programme, IGNITE Festival of Creativity and Green Minds. The following are examples of these projects.

2.19 Led by Plymouth City Council, **Green Minds** is a European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Urban Innovative Actions (UIA) funded project that aims to plan and manage the green spaces of Plymouth. To date, collaborations between AUP and Green Minds have created live

briefs and curriculum based projects for 235 students from across 14 courses. The aim is for students to develop creative responses, consider client needs and professional practice whilst also learning about and making positive contributions to important real world ecological solutions. The broad impact of Green Minds can be seen in examples including local community groups accessing cutting-edge technology by learning about environmental issues using Microsoft HoloLens augmented reality experiences, to the increased frequency of student and academic collaborations with the National Trust in the south west.

I really loved creating a meadow sign and being able to contribute a piece of art for the community. As well as also learning new skills on Inkscape. Absolutely amazing, I'm on the lookout for similar projects.

Year 1 BA Illustration student

2.20 One example activity was a collaboration with **The Living Labs Project**, who use digital sensors in Plymouth's parks and green spaces to monitor wildlife activity, air quality, temperature, humidity and number of visitors. Students across three of our BA Media courses: Animation & Games, Film & Screen Arts and Photography collaborated to create visual interpretations of this environmental data being collected in Plymouth. Sixty Level 4 students worked in cross-discipline groups to respond to the brief, creating proposals and artworks for a final proposal pitch event in front of tutors and clients, all with a view to taking selected projects forward to commission.

2.21 The University supports a number of publicly-facing organisations that provide opportunities for students to enhance their professional experience and employability:

2.22 **MIRROR** is AUP's dedicated on-campus public exhibition space supporting regional talent and showing national artists and creative practitioners, and enables us to offer our students real world experiences of working within a gallery context through internships and commissions run through the MIRROR online platform. With an independent public profile, MIRROR's exhibition programme is shaped by the curriculum and scheduled through an Advisory Group of senior academic staff and the Gallery Curator. Regular rotating exhibitions and events give focus to art, design and digital media giving our students the opportunity to learn from leaders in their fields while also actively strengthening and enhancing the offer of arts and culture in Plymouth.

2.23 **Plymouth Arts Cinema** based on our campus is the city's only independent cinema. It offers our students, staff and the public a showcase of arthouse, foreign language and modern classic films, and is the venue for BA Film & Screen Arts students to showcase work in an auditorium with a state-of-the-art sound system and cinema screen, and the industry basis for our BA Film Studies course launching in 2023.

2.24 **Makers HQ** is a unique and visionary community interest company, originally set up as a joint venture between AUP and Millfields Trust for the local community to reignite fashion and textiles manufacturing in Plymouth. It provides a tangible link between education and real industry experience, setting live briefs for students, as well as offering industry advice and experience. In 2020 Makers HQ responded during the pandemic by partnering with AUP to produce the protective gowns for a local medical practice. Within one week, over 30 students gave up their time to volunteer and over 100 kits were produced, reflecting the eagerness of students to get involved:

"This interest is testament to the kind of socially-minded students that we have on our course... a function over form project that encouraged our students to understand just how

transferable and valuable their skill set is. It reaches beyond the next trend to solve real-world problems that can benefit our local communities.” Fashion Course leader

SE4. Excellent academic practice - support and professional development for staff

2.25 Our comprehensive approach to recruitment, support and professional development for all of our staff underpins our high standards in learning, teaching and student experience.

2.26 As well employing HE teaching staff who are practitioners with creative industry experience, more recent emphasis on employing **research-active staff** is reflected in recruitment to new posts and vacancies. 82% of HE academic staff have an academic teaching qualification, 81% have a postgraduate qualification, 13% hold a doctorate and another 8% have their PhD in progress. Over the last two years we have successfully supported a range of academic and support staff - to achieve their **HEA fellowship** through a combination of in-house and external mentoring: 12 in total (12%) with a further 10 academic staff working towards submission in 2023 (22% by 2023).

2.27 Our library includes a dedicated staff library of books especially relevant to learning and teaching and signposts to further online resources and Sconul access to inter-library borrowing. The staff portal also archives a full range of teaching resources, such as recordings of peer to peer presentations from across the University to support dialogue around learning and teaching.

My Tutors have taught me to loosen up and dream bigger than I thought possible...I can think in a more informed and academic way through the research pointers they gave me. They tailor the teaching methods to each individual, and if we have an interest in something in particular they try to signpost us to the best paths to explore.

Painting Drawing & Printmaking student,
Trimester 1 survey 2022

2.28 Any colleagues who support learning & teaching can respond to open calls for our own **AUP Teaching Fellowships**, modelled on criteria used for evaluating applications for the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) claim.

2.29 Throughout the year, visiting speaker events are arranged to support staff in developing their teaching practice in response to contemporary themes, such as digital health and wellbeing or transnational education. The themes reflect emerging HE concerns and agendas. For example, the current QAA and Advance HE agenda on ‘Belonging’ as a mechanism to promote community and foster positive wellbeing will inform future workshops and events.

2.30 In addition, **dedicated Learning & Teaching days** are planned within the academic calendar each year. These events are a combination of external and internal speakers, presentations, workshops and conversations. Examples of recent themes including Climate & Ecological Emergency, Neurodiversity & Flexible Learning and Sharing Practice (Jisc). These events frequently deliver tangible outcomes, such as the Neurodiversity guide now in use across the university, and the development of a new staff development peer review model.

2.31 Mandatory for all staff involved in teaching, **peer review of teaching** is an annual reflection on teaching and learning and an opportunity to identify and share best practice. Owing to the global pandemic, a shift in working practices, the rapid change of delivery methods and

pedagogies, the evolving characteristics of our student community, and the importance of staff wellbeing, a redesign of our existing model was necessary. Based on the **UK Professional Standards Framework**, our new model was developed through collective staff discussion and subsequent working groups, before approval at the Academic Board. Feedback so far has been positive:

"As a newer member of staff at the start of my lecturing career, I found the peer review sessions both reassuring and informative. It has given me the chance to expand on new ideas, try out new delivery methods for neurodiverse students and to constantly question how I can positively adapt and grow as a professional for the ever changing and developing needs of our student body."
Observee, 2022

"Already I am finding that staff are exploring the challenges and opportunities existing within higher education, and are more open to embracing change. The sessions have acted as a 'testbed' for development and colleagues are increasingly seeing learning and teaching as an ongoing research project, rather than a 'test' of their performance." Observer,
2022

2.32 As a means to celebrate best practice, AUP Students' Union launched the annual Above & Beyond Awards in 2020, with a range of awards for both staff and students sitting equally alongside each other. In their commentary for the staff award nominations 2020, students reflected upon what they valued, alluding to the consistency of support and time given to them by staff at AUP.

Expansive knowledge in what seems to be everything, has assisted me in all kinds of circumstances across this year - be that developing my material practice, conceptual directions or career and promotional opportunities.

Above & Beyond feedback 2022

SE5. Supportive learning environments

"(AUP) is a thriving hub of creative endeavour and equally importantly a place that cares deeply about its students, their progression, and success."
Chief External Examiner Report 2020

2.33 All responses to NSS questions around Academic Support have improved in the last four years, with the latest 2022 results all at benchmark: 'I have been able to contact staff when I needed to' (83%) and 'good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course' (80%), or above benchmark 'I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course' (85%)

2.34 Students can be referred by their tutors or they can self refer to a **wide range of additional support services** - counselling, wellbeing, learning disability, financial, library, academic skills, IT, technical, employment, careers. The Library, Academic Skills and Learning Technology teams offer personalised one-to-one support and group sessions across a broad range of topics including: time management, critical reading, research skills, academic writing, confidence and presentation skills, all of which are available online. With high numbers of students presenting with mental health conditions we have developed a range of health and wellbeing services. Since 2018 we have implemented a single-session therapy model alongside the more traditional approach to

counselling which proved very positive in addressing issues arising early, and we continue to pursue one-off time limited sessions alongside a 1-6 session service for students requiring a deeper level of support (and referring externally for specialist support). We have provided mental health first aid training for staff (identifiable on campus by their pink lanyards) and are continuing this training into the future.

SE6. Physical and virtual learning resources

2.35 The University makes a **continuous investment in maintaining and upgrading equipment and resources**. In recent years over £150,000 has been invested in media facilities with new sound suites, film studios and upgraded photography studios. Based on the last five years, an annual investment of £0.65m has been made in maintaining the estate, maintaining and upgrading subject base rooms, IT, equipment and resources to ensure a student experience of a rich, diverse ecosystem of materials, processes and technologies that have been described as “sector-leading” (TDAP Report 2018). This includes the purchase of an electric furnace for hot glass, one of the first UK HEPs to install this capital equipment, which addresses the long term sustainability of hot glass teaching at University level in the South West.

2.36 **The Equipment Resource Centre (ERC)** is our hub of media resources and every student has access to over 6,000 items of industry-standard photography, film and audio kit. During the pandemic over £30,000 was invested in new camera and film-making equipment, with cameras and lighting equipment being couriered to students at their home addresses to enable them to continue and complete their productions during the lockdown periods in 2020 and 2021.

2.37 Our students have the opportunity to explore and develop skills outside their usual programme of study, choosing from a diverse, rolling menu of **open access workshops** through the dedicated Smarthub app, giving bookable access to equipment, technicians, studio spaces and workshops for students to pursue their research and making. These include mastering learning technologies and software, careers and employability planning and skills development, honing academic skills and writing, and experimenting with new technologies. These workshops give students a chance to encounter unfamiliar technical processes, strengthen existing skills, and engage in broader learning opportunities in the University. For example, the **Digital Fabrication Laboratory** (Fab Lab Plymouth) can be used by students across the University giving them access to Cutting-edge 2D and 3D design software and machinery, 3D printers and scanners, prototyping tools, laser cutters, vinyl cutters, milling machines and a large CNC router. This creates a perfect setting to work across traditional making and cutting-edge digital technology.

Something I've found that is quite unique about AUP is the technicians. They're all artists in their own right. They're not providing you with a narrow perspective. Everything they have to say is highly relevant.

Year 1 BA Fine Art student

“Resources and access to workshops were highly praised by students and external examiners with one noting that [AUP] had: ‘...a well-placed advantage over competitors due to the incredibly well-resourced workshops and facilities...’. These well-resourced environments create opportunities for independent learning and for students to develop their own practice to a high level.” Chief External Examiner Report 2020

SE7. Student Partnership

2.38 The last four years of NSS data confirm that students have had the right opportunities to provide course feedback with scores ranging from 82% to 86%, and the overall Student voice category responses have also improved in that period.

2.39 Feedback from students is obtained in a variety of ways. At an informal level the dialogue that takes place between students and technicians, tutors and course leaders is critical for the development of a sense of community. Anonymous student surveys are timed for induction, end of trimesters and exit from studies and cover students' experiences in terms of academic support, curriculum content and wider support services, and include questions linked to inclusivity and accessibility. Analysis is made at institution, course and cohort level, identifying any emerging trends to improve the provision and help ensure students feel strongly supported, academically and pastorally.

The meetings are for feedback we give to the tutors, that is acted upon, and feedback we get from the tutors....It is a moment of validation, and recognising you have a voice and you can implement things.

Year 2 BA Fine Art student

2.40 Formal student representation is based on two elected representatives per course/year group who provide student feedback to their course leaders, to underpin the AUP **ethos of co-creation** in steering course development and the student experience. Twice a year Student Staff Feedback Meetings (SSFMs) are attended by all student representatives for the course and relevant staff. Records are maintained, and responses to actions relating to issues raised made available to the cohort. An overarching report from the SSFMs is made to the Academic Board through the Student Engagement and Experience Committee.

2.41 Students are represented on key University committees, including Academic Board and on the Board of Governors. Student Voice meetings are held every 6-8 weeks. These are chaired by the SU President and attended by all student representatives, key senior managers and heads of services/departments. The Vice-Chancellor and members of the Senior Leadership Team also meet with the SU President and SU Executive twice a term to provide a direct route for communication. These mechanisms ensure **full dialogue between staff and students** and for staff to act on student feedback as appropriate.

Being a recipient of the Whatuni bursary means a lot to me, and I'm extremely grateful to have been chosen! This will have a significant positive impact on my transition from university to beginning my career in the industry.

WhatUni Bursary winner

2.42 In May 2022, AUP was ranked as the **number one Small or Specialist Institution in the Whatuni Student Choice Awards**. These awards are based on reviews submitted by students from across the UK, and winners judged by a panel made up of prospective and current university students. Highlighting the quality of

AUP's provision as a specialist creative university, the Small or Specialist category celebrates the overall experience of students, focusing on lecturers and teaching quality, the Students' Union experience, facilities and student life. Student submissions praised "fantastic lectures" and "incredible support" while others singled the University out for the "accepting and accommodating

nature” of staff and other students. Alongside the award AUP was allocated £10,000 in bursaries to grant to Widening Participating students. The students who were awarded the bursary are all active participants in the University community who go above and beyond the requirements of their course requirements,

3. STUDENT OUTCOMES

SO2 Continuation and completion

3.1 AUP achieved **high rates of continuation** in full-time study across its courses, with an overall indicator in TEF data of 87.7%, broadly in line with the benchmark of 88.8%.

3.2 Overall continuation for part-time study sits below benchmark and at the quality threshold of 55%. The TEF data for our part-time continuation reflects our typical cohort characteristics: mature students, with higher withdrawal rates from those over the age of 30 and with significant impact on continuation from those who have disclosed disabilities. As part of the new CUF curriculum there is the option to study all degrees through modular part-time study. This aims to offer greater flexibility for part-time students while remaining integrated with full-time study to support retention through strong integration with the wider community. The continuation indicator used in TEF highlights students who leave during early years, however our part-time continuation beyond this point is much higher.

3.3 The AUP TEF overall indicator for full-time completion sits well above the quality threshold of 75% but, at 79.8%, is below the benchmark of 83.5%. The trajectory through TEF Years 1 to 3 is of steady improvement from 79% to 81% before a drop in TEF Year 4 to 78.6%. Student recruitment into academic year 2016/17 (the entry year for TEF Year 4 for full-time completion) was the highest ever experienced for AUP into both Extended BA entry year and BA Year 1, but we also experienced the lowest continuation which, at 83%, was significantly below previous and following years. This dip in continuation also led to lower completion in 2018/19 despite retaining proportionally more students through BA Years 2 and 3. Of those completing there has been an **upward trend in degree outcomes**, with the proportion of ‘good’ honours increasing from 57% in 2015/16 to 69% in 2021/22.

3.4 AUP is working to improve its overall completion rates, and the following, in tandem with the introduction of the CUF, describes our approach. Support for students with disabilities remains of prime importance and we aim to ensure every student is able to achieve their ambitions at AUP and thereafter, by receiving the individualised support they need for success.

Support for students with disabilities

3.5 Recognising that the initial period at university is of prime importance for future success, there is strong and close collaboration between central student support services and individual course teams from the outset to ensure students are aware of and able to access appropriate support for their needs. The **diverse backgrounds and characteristics** of our students make this particularly important in terms of initial orientation and inspiring a sense

I feel much more comfortable in my own abilities and the community feel of the uni. I have also felt really supported by my cohort as well as my tutors.

Level 4 Trimester 2 Survey 21-22

of belonging. Course inductions and initial activities are designed to be inclusive, different types of SU activities and events are designed to ensure opportunities are available that will appeal to students from all backgrounds and characteristics, including those with physical, social or communication impairment, and orientation days in advance of the wider induction programme are offered by Student Support for students with disabilities.

3.6 The learning disability team deploys inclusive learning assistants, employed directly by AUP to work within and across courses providing 'in-course' support, mainly for new students who require support either because they are not eligible for DSA, or are waiting for their DSA application to be approved and support to be put in place, but also across continuing years where this support is needed for students.. Working closely with course teams and students the inclusive learning assistants are also able to refer students to Student Support for wellbeing/counselling services as appropriate, and/or to Academic Skills or Information Technology for their specific support. There has been a significant increase in demand across all years for this type of support from academic year 2021/22, the first academic year 'after' Covid-19, reflecting the ongoing impact from the pandemic particularly on mental health and social anxiety for students across all levels of education.

Covid-19 pandemic response

3.7 We are particularly proud of the way we approached learning and teaching and enhanced our overall engagement with all students during the Covid-19 pandemic. We maintained individual contact with our students as well as possible, maximised safety for students (including operating a comprehensive 'track and trace' system following reported positive tests), **maximised opportunities for learning** and introduced fair, effective actions to mitigate the impacts of Covid-19 public health measures for our students. We also maximised access to resources for students when physical attendance on campus was constrained to minimise physical interaction and, under periods of enforced campus closure, supplied equipment and materials to students' homes, including laptops, software and WiFi bundles. During lockdowns we maintained 'live' online learning and teaching, tutorials, and workshops including online individual support for students where relevant as well as online support from all services such as for IT, technical support, wellbeing and counselling, learning disability support, library and academic skills. We set up a

..I was having to do tailoring in my bedroom. I don't know how else you could have done better. The Uni told me I could get a sewing machine to take home as well. It was difficult, but there was no other way it could've been done.

Year 3 BA Costume student 2023

comprehensive array of ways to impart information for students, and ensured that the Senior Leadership Team and other key members of staff were available regularly through scheduled online sessions to help explain and clarify changes for all students. No formal complaints were received about the measures we took, and we saw a significant increase in the NSS score in the second year of the pandemic, in contrast to the UK sector trend.

SO1 The provider deploys and tailors approaches that are highly effective in ensuring its students succeed in and progress beyond their studies.

3.8 AUP has a **core commitment to student outcomes**, articulated in our Employability and Enterprise plan, which aims to: 'Create opportunities and maximise positive outcomes for our

graduates, seeking to establish AUP as the top Arts University in the UK for graduate progression into the creative industries’.

3.9 Some of our recent success and improvement in graduate outcomes (88% of graduates from 2019/20 progressing to employment and/or further study) can be attributed to our early adoption and strategic approach to employability. Initially situated within the Business Development directorate, the implementation of our **Employability, Enterprise and Entrepreneurship (3Es)** action plan in 2015 saw a programme of activities to centralise, consolidate and share best practice.

3.10 A key driver in our strategic approach has been to add value to the cultural, social and economic life of Plymouth and the South West region; to influence the city’s agenda for place-making through social, cultural and economic impact; and to develop a distinctive profile for this work nationally and internationally. In 2017 we were awarded the Social Enterprise Gold Mark by Social Enterprise Mark CIC, equal second amongst UK university sector institutions to achieve this prestigious award. The endorsement of AUP’s commitment to social impact contributed to wider development and enhancement of approaches to **graduate outcomes and employability agendas**.

3.11 **Partnership with the local and regional cultural community** has been instrumental in this strategy. Relationships with key stakeholders such as Plymouth City Council, The Box Plymouth, Tate St Ives, and Real Ideas have provided numerous live project opportunities, specifically tailored to the development needs of students. Notable examples have included:

- The photographic documentation of the Fine Art archive for The Box (formerly Plymouth City Museum); provided an extended work placement activity over a number of months for a large group of commercial photography students;
- The projection of student work at the Plymouth *Illuminate* Festival, a unique encounter with powerful immersive experiences achieving high visitor numbers, provided an exclusive opportunity for our Games and Animation students;
- Significant contribution to the high profile industry-facing event *iMayflower*, contributing to the creative infrastructure of the City and placing creatives centre stage in IGNITE, a city-wide recognition of regional graduate talent.

3.12 Alongside these cultural and social enterprise projects, through proactive industry and employer liaison, we have established **relationships with over 50 regional businesses** with National and International profiles including; Mercedes Benz South West, Princess Yachts, ProDirect Sport, Frugi, Finisterre, and Cornwall Interiors. These relationships have resulted in live briefs and placement opportunities for students from every one of our undergraduate degrees.

3.13 Many of these businesses have become employers, providing **full-time employment for our graduates**, such as The Range, a Plymouth-headquartered department store chain, which operates an in-house photographic studio staffed exclusively by graduates from our Commercial Photography degree course.

3.14 AUP’s course provision and curriculum has been continually informed by **industry engagement**. Our institutional membership of Creative UK provides valuable insight and intelligence from the creative industries, and also provides individual memberships for students,

offering exclusive employability content, including professional development and career planning tools and a wealth of video content. All third year students are required to activate their membership as part of their final professional practice module.

3.15 Many of our courses have established **Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) affiliations**, which ensure that our curriculum provision is recognised for industry relevance against national and international standards. Current affiliations include:

- The Association of Photographers (The AOP)
- The Association of Illustrators (AOI)
- The British Fashion Council (BFC)
- The Craft Council
- National Association for Education in the Moving Image (NAHEMI)
- National Association of Fine Art in Education (NAFAE)

The work experience modules on my degree taught me to be less anxious, more able to instruct and advise, as well as the ability to properly plan the work for a client, from paperwork, to communication.

BA Commercial Photography Alumni, Studio Manager at The Range, Plymouth

3.16 Every undergraduate course at AUP is able to demonstrate **explicit engagement with the creative industries**. Every one of our 14 undergraduate course leaders is a creative practitioner and industry professional, a key criteria in our staff recruitment strategy, bringing an understanding of the knowledge and skills required to succeed in the creative economy. In addition to driving curriculum design and pedagogic approaches, this connection brings access to commercial networks, providing students with a rich roster of over 560 visiting lecturers in total 2018-22 and other opportunities for professional engagement.

3.17 Employability at AUP, prior to the CUF introduction in 2021, was developed in credit bearing Professional Practice modules, guided by our Professional Development Planning benchmarks. Students have been provided with numerous learning experiences including: personal and professional development exercises, CV building, artist statement writing, live briefs, work placement opportunities, portfolio reviews and simulated interview exercises. The strength of this curriculum has been highlighted by external examiners in every course area. Examples from our most recent reports completed in Summer 2022 include:

“The curriculum includes a strong balance of academic, creative and entrepreneurial elements which all help the students to develop holistically and enables them to identify their place in a constantly changing industry.” BA Fashion Design

“Students at the higher end of the grading band show insight and developed awareness of product positioning, competitors and consumer profiles” BA Textile Design

3.18 The impact of these modules on the development of students' employability skills and **readiness for the workplace** has been significant. Delivered content has informed industry understanding, commercial awareness and business thinking. Collaborative exercises such as fundraising, publication and graduate exhibitions have developed skills in: critical thinking, problem

solving, team working, budgeting and project management.

3.19 Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, every degree course culminated in a **public exposition of student work** in both local and national exhibitions. These included: Photography and Commercial Photography at 'Freerange', the UK's largest graduate showcase; Fashion Design and Fashion Communication at Graduate Fashion Week; Textiles and Interior Design at the London Design Fair; Graphic Communication and Illustration at D&AD and New Designers; and 3D Design Craft at TENT and Bovey Tracey Craft Festival.

These graduate awards have given my work so much visibility. The greatest reward is getting my work in the public realm. Greater visibility of my work is worth its weight in gold.

Award winning 3D Craft Student

3.20 The University's continued commitment to showcasing student work at graduate events has resulted in numerous students having their work highlighted in **industry/graduate career-relevant publications** including Source, Creative Review, Dezeen, Aesthetica and The British Journal of Photography, alongside increasing coverage in national media including BBC, ITV and The Guardian.

3.21 Recent examples from an extensive list of student successes and award wins include: Fashion Design Students graduate collection noted as Highly Commended by Graduate Fashion Week (runner up, Best In Show); an Illustration student selected as one of the Association of Illustrators '10 UK Illustration Graduates to Watch in 2022' and announced Gold Award winner at the Creative Conscience Awards; a 3D Crafts student award winner in British Glass Biennial 2022; and Six Film graduates won 'Best Drama' at the Royal Television Society Devon & Cornwall Student Television Awards 2022.

3.22 Recognising the need to embed employability in the curriculum, the Careers and Enterprise function was reorganised in 2019, placing it within the Academic Team. Alongside the existing staff team, four Employability Champions were appointed from within academic staff teams. These roles facilitated the development and delivery of cross-University content and championed the development of an **institutional culture of employability**.

3.23 The CUF has enabled the complete embedding of Employability into the curriculum, where every 30 credit Unit is underpinned by a set of **Employability Attributes** which detail 12 specific competencies, identified from research into the evolving needs and demands of employers and industry in the 21st century creative economy.

3.24 The success of the embedding employability into our curriculum has again been noted in a number of external examiner reports (2022), including:

"The business and personal development elements of the course are particularly impressive, with students fully engaging in these areas" BA Fashion Design

"The students had a clear ownership and understanding of their design work and how they see their practice situated within the greater creative sector" BA Graphic Design

3.25 Alongside timetabled delivery, Enhancement initiatives have further supported the embedding of employability into the curriculum. **Your Creative Future**, delivered in March 2021, saw 528 attendees at a range of physical and online activities which included personal branding, interview and presentation skills, small business advice and talks from a number of keynote industry guests. Your Creative Future continues to be developed with a particular focus on Level 6 students to support them in their transition from creative study into professional practice.

I have been given plenty of connections and opportunities to continue working professionally and develop my skills...The support from both lecturers and careers team has been fantastic.

Year 3 BA Painting,
Drawing & Printmaking
student

3.26 As students progress through their studies they are supported by a dedicated **Careers Education Information and Guidance service** that supports their progression into employment, professional practice or further study. Alongside taught sessions and one-to-one tutorial support, students are provided with a wealth of supporting material including online toolkits, curated reading lists and career planning tools with support is available to graduates for up to three years after graduation. Our high quality service is rigorously audited,

achieving membership of AGCAS (Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services) in 2020.

3.27 From evaluation of sector trends and graduate outcomes data, we are aware that some groups of students perform better than others when compared to published benchmarks. AUP's data however, shows relatively little disparity between groups of students. Our careers service and other support functions within the university have a particular **focus on supporting students from disadvantaged backgrounds** who have declared disabilities and/or mental health issues.

3.28 Careers Advisors work closely with Academic Skills and Student Support to provide advice and **guidance to students with a range of disabilities** including: dyslexia, dyspraxia, ASD, as well as those with physical disabilities and mental health conditions. This includes support with drafting CVs, cover letters, applications, coaching and mentoring. Recent examples include; assisting a graduate to disclose their to access reasonable adjustments for an online assessment; supporting a graduate with with a number of online applications, and coaching them through the interview process, (resulting in a successful interview and subsequent job offer); and ongoing support for a graduate with , resulting in them achieving an artists residency with Ocean Studios in Plymouth.

3.29 Referrals to **external support agencies** including the Diversity Business Incubator (for ethnic minority entrepreneurs) and Creative Outset, mean that the careers service can offer informed advice and guidance to students and alumni irrespective of their social, economic or cultural status, or any disclosed disabilities or mental health issues.

3.30 Our expanded employability team has enabled a supported approach to **work integrated learning**. Our Employer Engagement Coordinator provides a central point of contact for all live brief and external commission opportunities, developing external contacts, managing projects and working with subject teams and students to deliver projects that directly develop our students' employability skills. Notable paid commissions in the last 12 months have included projects for

British Land Consortium, Plymouth City Council, The Ocean Conservation Trust and University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust.

SO3. Outstanding rates of successful progression

3.31 Our Careers Service provides tailored **Enterprise and Entrepreneurship support**, through an experienced small business advisor. This has supported numerous students with the knowledge and confidence to pursue their own businesses, with an increasing number of graduates now developing successful business start-ups and freelance careers. Notable examples have included: Studios - a professional studio founded by Commercial Photography graduate ; WiaWear - a clothing label founded by Fashion graduate ; and Home Designs - founded by Interior Design graduate, .

3.32 For those students progressing into further study, significant impact has been achieved through the development of our **postgraduate provision**. We offer 15 taught Master's degrees providing a progression route for every one of our undergraduate degrees. Our 2022/23 cohort of 77 postgraduate students includes 12 students who progressed directly from their undergraduate degree in 2021/22, and a further 26 students who completed their undergraduate degrees since 2014 and have subsequently returned to study.

3.33 Our continuing **relationship with our alumni**, while celebrating and publicising their success, has further fuelled our culture of employability and enterprise. Many alumni have become contributors to curriculum events such as *Pro Talks* and industry symposia, and many now provide work placement and/or **mentoring support**. Recent notable examples include: A Game Arts graduate who now works as a User Interface and Experience Designer for Sony; a Costume Design graduate who now works as a costume designer on the TV series *Bridgerton*; and a Fashion Media & Marketing graduate who established own fashion consultancy, working with brands including Vans, Animal and Sainsburys.

I wanted to let you know that I have been offered a 6 month contract at Silverstream TV as a junior producer. This couldn't of been achieved without your help and I wanted to say a massive thank you!!

Year 3 BA Film Arts Student

3.34 Our evolving Employability and Enterprise strategy has driven an improvement in the Graduate Outcomes results, from 52% of graduates in high skilled employment or further study in 2018 to 61% in 2020.

3.35 Despite this, we remain aware of our comparatively low proportion (53% in 2019/20) of graduates progressing into highly skilled employment (not further study) within 15 months of graduating. There are a number of factors to be considered here which have already been identified in this submission such as; the profile of our students, the South West economy, and poor performance in terms of highly skilled progression in our Costume Production course which despite recording 0% unemployment, returned a progression into highly skilled employment of just 7%. This very specific degree provides a successful pathway for students into the costume industry, with many graduates progressing into industry recognised professional roles such as Sewing Machinist and Junior Wardrobe Assistant. Our advocacy with GuildHE continues to press regulators to recognise these and similar roles as highly skilled graduate outcomes in the creative industries.

3.36 AUP is committed to **maximising positive outcomes for our graduates** and we have confidence that the ongoing development of our employability and enterprise strategy in the next year, will continue our trajectory to achieve a performance more in line with benchmark. Key developments being put in place as at November 2022 include the following:

3.37 To provide new leadership of our Careers and Enterprise function, an **Assistant Dean for Student Experience** was appointed in September 2022, working under the newly appointed Dean. This key role has a cross-University remit to manage multiple aspects of the student experience, including employability and enterprise, with particular responsibility for graduate outcomes.

3.38 The Assistant Dean led the development in 2022 of the **Employability and Enterprise action plan**. With seven key objectives, it sets out the roadmap linked to our Strategic Plan 2023-2030 for an institutional culture of employability and enterprise where relationships are developed with industry partners and employers, establishing links with creative industries, and enterprise, entrepreneurship and innovation are encouraged, creating new opportunities through Knowledge Exchange. This comprehensive and fully integrated strategic approach aims to maximise positive outcomes for our graduates, establishing AUP as an outstanding Arts University for graduate progression into the creative industries.

SO4. Educational gains.

3.39 AUP has introduced the Graduate Attribute frameworks, articulated through the CUF. This encompasses extracurricular activities by students and maps them to learning outcomes in Unit assessment, allowing **assessment of educational gain**. The frameworks, aligned with our Strategic Plan and its Learning & Teaching Strategy, focus on **Graduate Attributes, Employability and Digital Literacy**

3.40 In the context of a small specialist arts institution, the framework acknowledges the distinctiveness of individual creative voices while simultaneously providing a robust academic framework from which to scaffold levels of learning and student attainment. The CUF is in its second year of operation, with Level 4 and 5 cohorts providing valuable data on attainment, progression and efficacy of the curriculum.

3.41 Educational gain as a fundamental concept was introduced at an early stage in the development of the CUF with Graduate Attributes, Employability and Digital Literacy mapped and deeply integrated into each of the 12 units and their learning outcomes. Thus students progressing through the Units **assimilate the attributes and competencies by studying the core curriculum**, rather than through a separate extra-curricular offer. The development of Graduate Attributes becomes an intrinsic outcome of the Unit for students and a measure of educational gain as they progress through the Levels of study.

3.42 Each key area has a set of four core competencies: **creative practice, professional agency, ethos & values and collaboration**, mapped against the common learning outcomes of the CUF. Graduate attributes are assessed against the framework and fed back formatively at the summative assessment stage. The CUF summative assessment outcomes are designed to be synoptic, opening the space for independent and self-directed study within the Unit and summarised by students through short reflective writing, presentation or portfolio submission.

3.43 The CUF evidences **outstanding innovation** in the context of a small specialist Arts University, embedding educational gain into the learning journey aligned to attributes that research shows are in demand in the creative industries.

SO5. Approaches to supporting students to achieve educational gains

3.44 The Graduate Attribute framework has been developed to define clearly our offering, support graduate success and underpin the design and delivery of our curriculum across Level 4, 5 and 6. It provides a framework to which other activities are developed from and linked to and was developed in consultation with external partners, regional employers and sector colleagues. As well as being mapped to the curriculum, these are embedded into our extracurricular activities, eg. 'Your Academic Journey' week in Trimester 1 or 'Imagination and Curiosity Week' in Trimester 2. They also underpin workshops delivered through our Wednesday Workshop scheme, which supports students to undertake extension and enrichment activity in academic, careers and technical workshops. This can be extended to Digital Badging accreditation through city partner organisation Badge Nation, managed through our Careers and Employability team.

3.45 The Level 4 'Platforms of Exchange' Unit 404 (Trimester 2 2021-22) is an example of a cross-course Level 4 Unit comprising a range of approaches to developing student learning, including practical and theoretical components. Students broaden their subject focus through integration with the wider creative community at AUP, producing creative solutions to a school-wide thematic project (eg. in 2021-22 'Art for a living world') with a primary focus on social justice. The Unit combines critical thinking and practical application with group-working at the centre of learning through the production of a project artefact (real or virtual). In support of producing new work, it provides opportunities to develop skills of communication through team working, critical reflection, image/artefact and spoken word. The focus is on the critical and applied knowledge gained through team working, evidenced through a 2,000 word critical reflection upon collaborative working with peers and staff, and the impact of individual contribution in determining creative project outcomes.

This module really helped me build on my social anxiety and insecurities, as this project was taken seriously and professionally, which made communication much easier for me. I will take away many teamwork skills such as communicating, collaborating and creating together.

Year 1 Platforms of Exchange feedback

3.46 The Unit outcomes were characterised by the quality and variety of the team projects, the range of themes explored and ethical problem solving already evident at Level 4. It tested students to research, define a problem, write a brief and collaboratively solve problems through team statement writing for the summative exhibition as well as the Archive Newspaper which celebrated the results and provided exemplar work for the following year's briefing.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 *“I can testify that (AUP) is a thriving hub of creative endeavour and equally importantly a place that cares deeply about its students, their progression, and success. The leadership teams and their deputies (academic and professional services) are to be commended for their vision, strategy, and genuine desire to create a learning environment that is student-focused, community-linked, and highly aspirational in its mission...the opportunities for discipline specific and inter and cross-disciplinarity are excellent. Given the operating context, the workshop facilities, their academic leadership, and technical support are outstanding.”* Chief External Examiner 2020

4.2 AUP is on a trajectory of continuous enhancement, including the creation of an innovative and student-centered curriculum to reflect the needs of a 21st century specialist creative education in the arts. Our creative undergraduate cohorts are diverse, with 60% of our undergraduate full-time cohort comprising students who were either mature on entry, young from low participation neighbourhoods, students with disabilities, or students from households with low income. Our data-driven student support and wide range of student support services mean that we ensure that every student is able to achieve their ambitions at AUP. We have achieved very high rates of continuation in full-time study across our courses as we prepare our graduates with a real confidence in their abilities to enter the job market or to work as entrepreneurs. Graduates leave us with a deep relationship to their creative discipline, a resilience to creative risk and an ability to work across boundaries.

4.3 Our learning, teaching and assessment approach delivers a rich and broad portfolio which offers flexibility in practice, whilst ensuring core and essential learning to support successful graduate outcomes. Course content across AUP is based on the extensive professional knowledge base, research and industry-leading practice of our staff. Co-creation opportunities for student-led learning are embedded within the curriculum, giving students agency in designing learning content and enhancement activities alongside staff, with access to excellent technical resources. Our outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment outcomes are reflected in our above benchmark 2022 NSS results.

4.4. Our core commitment to student outcomes is strengthened through our work in our regional, national and international community, increasing our employability links within the city and region, developing new strategic partnerships and developing an institutional culture of employability. The assurance for our students is that every undergraduate course has as its DNA an explicit engagement with the creative industries and with work-integrated learning.

I believe, quite genuinely, that Arts University Plymouth is a special place unlike any other in the UK. There is an indescribable atmosphere here...- something closer to family than a community. I have never been someone who took pride in where they lived or studied - I spent a lot of my life in [redacted] areas, where going to University wasn't really an option for anyone. No one in my family has done this before..

Student Union President 2023

5. REFERENCES

Internal documents

- AUP Common Unit Framework
- AUP Academic Regulations
- AUP Assessment & Moderation Procedure
- AUP Tutorial Practice Guidelines

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