

## Optional student submission for TEF 2023

### INTRODUCTION

York St John University (YSJ) is a Higher Education Institution (HEI) based in York, North Yorkshire. YSJ also has a satellite campus in London, which has recently moved to larger premises owing to an increase in student numbers. Driven by the University's commitment to social justice, YSJ's mission is to be an inclusive and welcoming community, where students can succeed in their degrees and become socially aware graduates. Tackling inequalities, promoting fairness and challenging prejudice underpin pedagogy and practice within the learning and teaching community at YSJ, permeating the University's wider culture and values. To accommodate the growth and diversification of courses, the University has recently invested in digital technologies, resources and assets – including a new Creative Centre for the arts – and has increased resourcing in the area of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

Staying true to its founding values, the University is a widening participation (WP) institution with a majority WP intake, and works with various feeder schools across the local area to improve participation in HE for individuals from low socio-economic backgrounds. This correlates with YSJ's 2026 strategy of extending the transformative power of university education to the communities the institution serves. Since the last submission, the University has worked closely with the Students' Union (SU) to ensure that students have more effective feedback mechanisms, that learning is co-curricular and that there is an authentic partnership approach to the learning experience at YSJ.

### 1. Approach to evidence-gathering

To evidence the narrative within this submission, the SU has used existing data from recent National Student Survey (NSS) results, University committee papers and internal University/SU surveys. In addition, the SU has conducted focus groups with students to further understand 'Educational Gain' within the context of YSJ. The SU understands that quantitative data is a primary form of evidence for TEF; however, it is also important to include qualitative data from the student perspective, as this gives 'flesh to the bones' of the data, and YSJ prides itself on all students being 'a name, not a number'. The SU has also utilised data collected from its 'Zone' meetings (in particular, the 'Education Zone'), feedback from Course Rep forums and surveys coordinated by the SU to help inform and shape the narrative within this submission.

### 2. Student experience

#### STUDENT VOICE

In 2021, the University and SU developed and adopted an approach to student voice entitled 'Partnership Plus', emphasising the importance of collaboration with students within the learning experience. Partnership Plus operates across micro, meso and macro levels, each of which is addressed below.

#### Micro level

Each academic programme has elected 'Academic Reps' who gather student opinion and feedback on course quality and experience. Academic Reps attend mandatory training provided by the SU Student Opportunities team; they also attend Programme panels to articulate the feedback and ideas of their course peers to the Programme Team, with a view to making positive changes and development within courses. Academic Reps work collaboratively with the Chairs of School (see the section on meso level, below), ensuring that any issue or change that requires escalation is communicated with the Chair to discuss at School level. Academic Reps facilitate positive change for their peers' learning and teaching experiences at YSJ. For example, on the part-time MA Education course, Academic Reps gave feedback about course and assessment timings to lecturers and, from this, the structure of teaching and assessment dates were changed to better suit part-time learners.

Students are also given the opportunity to feed back on their course experience via mid- and end-of-module evaluations, and many programmes offer informal ways (forums, discussions, etc.) for students to provide feedback across the academic year. An example of strong practice within this

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area is the model the Drama and Dance department adopt, encouraging dialogic feedback with students at regular intervals throughout the academic year. Here, staff facilitate informal feedback sessions where students can ask questions about the learning and teaching on their modules, and receive support and advice immediately from their module tutors.

Students give their feedback about the whole learning experience via the National Student Survey, Teaching Experience Survey (levels 3, 4 and 5), as well as the YSJ Experience Survey (introduced in 2022). The SU also operates a monthly feedback activity, 'Question of the Month', which asks the student community their opinion and feedback on a range of student experience topics. For example, a recent question has been ('Do you feel that you are partner in your education?') has been used to inform areas for improvement in the 'Partnership Plus' strategy, such as increased visibility of the work staff undertake in and through their communications with students.

Finally, the SU hosts 'Zones' to capture the views of students on three main areas: education, activities and wellbeing/support. Zones occur once per term, and members of the University's Executive Board and Senior Leadership Team have presented to students at these events in order to better understand student views and ideas on key issues and developments. Education Zone minutes are presented to Education Committee members as a key paper on the agenda, allowing student voice to be at the forefront of high-level University committee discussions.

### **Meso level**

The Chairs of School are the lead student representatives at School level. These students are elected part-time officers of the SU who gather feedback from Academic Reps, ensuring that student views on course quality and academic experiences are heard by the change-makers in each School through participation in School Leadership Team meetings, Programme Panels and University committees.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chair of the School of the Arts worked closely with the Head of School to create a School of the Arts Virtual Networking platform. Even under pandemic restrictions, this platform allowed cross-collaboration between performance, design and production students, where they were able to share practice with one another and forge relationships within and across the creative community. This is an example of the positive work that Chairs of School can have within the learning and teaching community at YSJ.

The SU Council is another key forum made up of part-time officers and other student representatives to discuss key issues affecting students at the University: views and ideas are gathered, and feedback is given to the University's Executive Board and/or Senior Leadership Team. The SU's part-time officers are also members of several working groups set up to improve EDI within the University, including the Disability Forum (whose work includes making changes to facilities to enhance accessibility, and improving resources such as introducing accessible learning technologies) and a Decolonising the Curriculum group led by the BAME Students Officer.

### **Macro Level**

In 2021, the SU and Pro Vice Chancellor: Learning and Teaching (now the Pro Vice Chancellor: Education, PVCE) developed a 'Student Representation Code' (see Academic Rep System below), detailing the partnership between the University, SU and students regarding the student representation system. This code was presented to and reviewed by Education Committee, which constitutes another accountable body ensuring the representative system is effective and relevant. The SU's President of Education is Deputy Chair of the Education Committee and works with the Chair to set the agenda and steer the business for the committee. Within agenda-setting meetings, student voice is also valued by the Executive Board, who invite substantive agenda items regarding learning and teaching from the student perspective to be brought to the committee.

It is the opinion of the SU that the University is fostering a positive partnership with students through engagement in committees and groups. The SU's Presidents and part-time officers are members of key University committees and groups, ensuring that student input is at the heart of decision making. University committee and group membership includes (but is not limited to) the

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following: University Governing Body; Education Committee (President of Education is Deputy Chair); Finance and Capital Development Committee; Academic Board; Quality and Standards Committee; Access and Participation Plan working group; and the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Staff Development Task and Finish Group.

The SU's Presidents and CEO also meet with the University's Executive Board every six weeks to discuss key developments within the University alongside student issues and views, and future strategic changes and challenges. The SU/Executive Board committee is an important point of communication between the University and SU, as key 'hot topics' are discussed and actions agreed to ensure a collaborative partnership between the two bodies. On top of this, the SU President meets with the Vice Chancellor once per month, and the CEO also meets with the Vice Chancellor and the Chief Operating Officer once per month, respectively. The President of Education likewise meets monthly with the PVC: Education (PVCE).

The SU is involved in Executive Board and Senior Leadership Team-level recruitment processes, being part of both interview and forum panels, and feeding directly into decision-making processes. The SU and student groups were also members of the Capital Project groups helping to inform the concept and design of the SU Building in 2016 and the Creative Centre in 2021.

### **The Academic Rep System**

The Academic Representative system is a partnership between the SU and the University, foregrounding the University's 'Partnership Plus' approach in relation to all aspects of education. This approach involves a feedback loop that reflects each of the key stakeholders (the University, the student body and the SU,) so that students' ideas and opinions are then taken forward to enhance the development of academic strategy and delivery. In 2021/22, a total of 287 Academic Reps were elected across all courses, inclusive of both the York and London campus. The SU Academic Rep system is also expanding on a regular basis to accommodate new course provisions.

Within the London campus, Tutor Group Reps and Social Reps were introduced in 2021/22 following a sharp increase in student numbers. Students were elected for September and January cohorts and, in its first year of implementation, 24 Course Reps and 21 Social Reps were elected. At a time of writing this submission, the London campus has been granted School status, and it is planned that the London Students Officer will attend School Quality Panels (SPQs) as the main representative.

### **Student Voice – Satisfaction**

At YSJ, students are generally of the opinion that 'Student Voice' is strong and makes a positive impact to the learning community. This is evidenced by continuous satisfaction indicators such as the NSS, where YSJ has shown consistently above-sector benchmarks for questions relating to student voice (4.1% in 2020; 3.6% in 2021; 4.3% in 2022).

Qualitative feedback from students is routinely explored and acted upon by and within the University. An example of this was the support expressed by students for the implementation of Lecture Capture, which was discussed at an Education Zone in 2021. Following a successful pilot that year Academic Board approved the lecture recording policy, and 72 teaching rooms across the York and London campuses now have lecture recording capabilities. The SU played a vital role in developing the lecture recording policy to ensure accessibility was at the forefront of the policy document. For example, disabled and neurodivergent student representatives were consulted on how to make the lecture recording policy accessible for all students, which led to a further captioning policy being introduced to make sure the new system was inclusive and accessible to all.

Students have also been able to inform the development of both online and offline learning environments via module feedback (on course environment and resource) and, on a larger scale, capital projects. Students were consulted on the creation of the Communities Centre, informed the implementation of a BSL recording room via course and SU feedback, and discussed the

introduction of hearing impaired-friendly Fire Alarm systems at an Education Zone. Student consultation was similarly at the heart of the building of the Creative centre (which opened in September 2021), with the SU President being part of the project group and student opinion and ideas collected via Student Experience Zones.

## **THE LEARNING COMMUNITY**

### **Community**

It is often noted that students at YSJ feel that they are 'more than a number', and that belonging to a smaller institution allows for multi-team collaboration in supporting and aiding student success. The community is very much centred around campus-based, face-to-face activity (both at York and London), which is supported by online activity and networks. Students are often encouraged to aid the development of their curriculum via partnership approaches (as discussed above, with regard to 'Partnership Plus'), and through research-driven and/or investigatory learning activities.

The strong sense of belonging at YSJ is also evidenced in responses to NSS questions relating to the 'Learning Community', which have been consistently above the sector average (3.8% in 2020; 3.2% in 2021); indeed, in 2022, student satisfaction was a full 6.9 percentage points above the sector benchmarks. YSJ fosters a community of continuous learning and development. This does not just happen within the classroom, but through a range of multi-team, collaborative opportunities that are available to students, such as volunteering and placement opportunities linked to academic courses; 'students as researchers' projects; the opportunity to serve as course reps; and part-time employment opportunities across the University. The University and the SU are continuously and collaboratively developing ways to help students recognise the skills and attributes they have gained through formal and informal learning experiences. An example of this is the 'Reward and Recognition' module accessed via the SU's Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, where skills and experiences gained as volunteers or employees of the SU are available to students via a personal dashboard. Students can use this information to work with the Careers Service on personal development and workplace-readiness activities.

### **Course Teaching**

Within recent years, the University has placed an increased focus on social justice-orientated learning and teaching, with various discipline areas incorporating the University's commitment to making a real difference in the world within their curriculum design. Learning and teaching on all courses at YSJ is also underpinned by the four main themes: Collaboration, Communities, Compassion and Curiosity ('the four Cs'), as described in YSJ's '*Pedagogy through Transition*' strategy document (2021). We believe that this document encapsulates YSJ's values-led learning approach, as set out in the refreshed Strategy 2026. Teaching occurs using multiple approaches that not only challenge the individual's learning capacity and talent, but also create readiness for professional career situations. An example of this is within the York Business School, where first-year Events Management students are asked to work together to coordinate a full-scale event for 'a client' and then evaluate its success.

Students across the University are also involved in programme validation processes, where they play an active role in the development of the curricula and assessment for new courses and for courses that are due to be re-validated. Students are trained for this role and remunerated for their time, which increases engagement with the work. This is an example of where learning and teaching and pedagogic practice is underpinned by student voice at YSJ.

NSS indicators show that students are generally satisfied with learning and teaching on their courses as, for the past three years, YSJ's results have been above both the University's target of 80% satisfaction and sector benchmarks (1.7% in 2020; 3.5% in 2022). However, there are some courses such as Computing and Languages where NSS satisfaction scores dipped below 70% in 2022. The SU is satisfied with the way that the University has responded to this dip, implementing Programme Review Enhancement (PRE) whereby senior members within the schools put together an action plan with course-level staff to address specific areas of concern.

### **Assessment**



Assessment at YSJ offers students opportunities to demonstrate their learning and understanding through a variety of platforms. Students not only evidence their learning through essays/written assignments and 'traditional' examination, but through 'authentic assessment' group-work projects, showcases, audience events, placements and work experience opportunities (to name but a few). The Learning and Teaching Leads in each School (introduced in 2019) have been the main drivers of more course-appropriate, authentic assessment options. Assessment is evaluated by students during mid-module surveys, annual YSJ Experience Surveys, the National Student Survey and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey. Assessment design and processes are also evaluated by academics from the sector and industry professionals during external examiner processes, as well as by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs).

The University has implemented a three-week turnaround policy for student assessment and feedback and, overall, there has been positive student feedback about this. The SU has also worked with the University on the introduction of anonymous marking (where possible), which aims to ensure that there is no concern regarding potential bias when marking assessments. The Schools were receptive to the implementation of this policy, and the University and SU continue to work positively together on its roll out.

Although below the University's target of 80% satisfaction, the NSS indicators for satisfaction relating to assessment and feedback have been consistently (highly) above sector benchmark for the past three years (7.4% in 2020; 5.1% in 2021; 8.5% in 2022).

### **Academic Support**

Supporting students underpins pedagogic practice at YSJ, and academic support is particularly important within the YSJ community. As a university that was founded on widening participation principles, students come to YSJ from various diverse backgrounds, and therefore sometimes require further support to succeed in their studies. The University provides a Study Support Team service for students, which offers essay-writing, referencing and research support in an encouraging and non-judgemental environment. This is one of the strengths of YSJ: if students require help academically, there is no judgement – just continued support to help them succeed in their degrees.

Added to this, the University offers academic Liaison Librarians for each of the five Schools. The Liaison Librarians support students with accessing resources within the library and support with referencing, etc.; they are all specialists within their subject areas and can therefore offer tailored support to students as and where needed. When discussing the importance of liaison librarian provision at the University, one student commented:

'My academic liaison librarian offered me excellent 1-2-1 support at the beginning of my degree, sitting down with me to go over my referencing. They gave me confidence in my academic abilities and set me on a trajectory to believe I was capable of getting a degree, despite being the first in my family to attend university'.

The University has also supported the SU to implement our own Academic Advice Service, where the SU's Advice Coordinator works collaboratively with the University's Student Casework Managers to help students navigate disciplinary processes. There has been a significant increase in the number of students accessing the Advice Service, which we believe is due to increased signposting of our services, meaning more students know that it is available. Over the past academic year, the SU Advice Service has supported over one hundred student cases; before the implementation of the 'official' service, annual advice cases brought to the SU never exceeded sixty students per year. The University has also supported the SU in promoting the Advice Service over the last few years, exemplifying their continued commitment to students' wellbeing and success in attaining their academic degrees.

Academic tutoring (AT) is of high importance at YSJ, with members of staff being affiliated with the United Kingdom Advising and Tutoring Association (UKAT), where they are interested in the development and advancement of academic tutoring within the HE sector. From this affiliation, staff

members pass on best practice to colleagues at YSJ, who in turn provide high-quality academic tutoring for students. At YSJ, there is not currently a university-wide approach to academic tutoring (although this is coming soon through the University's Learning and Teaching Student Experience [LTSE] Action Plan); instead, staff take a subject-specific approach to their sessions. For example, AT sessions for Primary Education students are vastly different to those for Computer Science students, as they clearly have unique needs from an academic as well as pastoral perspective. However, it is notable that one approach underpins all AT practice at YSJ: primarily, academic tutors are there to support the learning and teaching journey of students at all levels, but they are also there to provide initial pastoral support for students before signposting tutees to other services for more tailored or specialised support services.

Academics who are affiliated with UKAT have also offered opportunities for students to be involved with conferences discussing the value of academic tutoring from a student perspective. For instance, in early 2022, undergraduate and masters' level students from the School of Education, Language and Psychology were invited to speak at the UKAT Annual Conference, discussing their perspective on academic tutoring. One student noted:

'The opportunity to be invited to speak at the UKAT Annual conference was a brilliant experience where I was able to network with leading professionals within the industry and understand further what the world of higher-level academia is like. I was encouraged to believe in myself and to understand that this would be an excellent opportunity to support my research specialisms on my master's degree alongside looking great on my CV for future career prospects'.

### **Learning Resources**

YSJ has a blend of specialist and multi-functional spaces for students to make use of for social interests and activities, to aid their studies and/or to enhance their personal skills and experiences. For example, the on-campus Law Clinic and the Counselling and Mental Health Clinic offer law and counselling students the opportunity to gain real-life work experience within practice-based environments, while the Creative Centre offers specialist spaces for students to perform, create and exhibit their work, alongside opportunities to host conferences, showcases and extra-curricular activities. Across campus, there are social learning spaces set up to encourage students to continue learning even when they are not in dedicated learning and teaching environments. Throughout the Holgate Centre, students can use 'booths and pods' where they can socialise, host small meetings with peers or study using personal devices as and when required. This building also hosts an area dedicated to student PC usage as an alternative study space to the Library and Learning Centre. The SU Lounge is designed to be a social learning space where students can study individually or in groups, in a different environment to that offered across campus.

The Learning Centre hosts the University library, lecture and seminar rooms, digital resources and loaning services (such as laptop loan), and is one of the key student spaces on campus. The Centre provides spaces for learning individually, in groups and in silent study, so all students and study styles are catered for and supported by effective technologies and online/offline resources. Following student feedback, the Learning Centre became available for 24 hours a day during term time, enabling students to study at times most convenient for them. One student representative noted:

'When working a part-time job alongside university, it is not always possible to study during the working day, so the library being open through the night allows me to still work on my degree on my terms. It is also great for international students as when home students return home, they often do not have much to do, but the library provides them a welcoming learning environment'.

In a 2022 Library and Learning Services team survey, 97.69% of students agreed that 'Overall, Library and Learning Services supports my learning well'; this was an improvement on the 96.95% of students who agreed with this statement in 2021.

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As well as providing specific learning resources for courses, students at YSJ can use the York campus as a learning resource. For example, through the work of the Institute of Social Justice's Living Lab project, students work with the University's Estates team on real-world ecological projects. Investment in this work has seen a growth in green spaces across campus and allowed students to use these spaces within their practice on various courses.

The Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) at YSJ is a useful tool for students in accessing content needed for their course. For example, students have access to an online library catalogue, which allows them to source print, e-book and journal articles wherever they are working. This is particularly beneficial for commuting students at YSJ, who can study from home as effectively as if they were on campus in the library. The University's Moodle platform is another aspect of the VLE that facilitates students' learning experiences. During a focus group discussion with student officers, the noted:

'Moodle is easy to use and all materials are in one place; therefore, organised with my work and know where to go to access any content that I need to review for my assessments. This platform also offers the opportunity for students and staff to share ideas with one another, encouraging a collaborative and supportive learning community'.

### **SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC**

During the pandemic, the University established a central coordination team, which included members from across the University and SU. This team not only agreed actions around the health, safety and wellbeing of the YSJ community, but ensured plans were in place and actioned accordingly to enable students to continue their studies with as little disruption as possible. The central team aided the Executive Board's decision about rent rebates being awarded to students living in Halls (who returned home), and worked with City of York Council on improving the experience of students residing in shared private housing.

Although there was some online teaching provision in a cluster of courses before the pandemic hit, YSJ prides itself on being a face-to-face community and its campuses are at the heart of academic provision and student life. In February/March 2020, the University in collaboration with the SU moved quickly to establish ways of continuing quality teaching and learning provision online, including upskilling academic staff, investing in digital technologies and infrastructure, and creating or adapting policies to ensure that they were compassionate and supportive to the 'new' teaching and learning experience. In September 2020, students and staff returned to a COVID-safe campus, adopting socially distanced learning and social activities. During this time, provision for specialist equipment and resources was also prioritised as a key teaching and learning function. In one of our Education Zones that year, students commented: 'I feel safe and comfortable during lectures and there is room for students to spread out', and 'I feel safe on campus, but still worried generally about COVID'.

Following the return to campus in September 2020, the University and SU worked diligently to establish alternative assessment modes, blended learning options and a 'No Detriment' policy designed to ensure that a student's individual academic outcome was not detrimentally affected by the learning environment or (lack of) resources they were faced with at home or in their student accommodation. This then led to the review of other policies, such as the exceptional circumstances policy, where 'self-certification' for physical and mental illnesses of up to seven days was introduced to mitigate absences due to COVID-19.

Following on from the pandemic, the University Registry Team worked closely with the SU President of Education to redevelop the University's exceptional circumstances policy to reflect how both the environment at YSJ and the wider HE sector had changed. The main priority of this work was to consult student representatives about the continuation of the self-certification section of the policy, which had been successful during the pandemic. The resultant policy allows students to self-certify for physical or mental health reasons once per semester, as opposed to the original suggestion from the University of once per academic year. It was also agreed that the University would adopt a more compassionate approach to exceptional circumstances, particularly regarding

bereavements. A 'one-week extension' policy was adopted to reduce the need for onerous (and sometimes, insensitive) evidence submission by students who needed just one week longer to submit assignments when facing short-term negative life experiences.

Most students welcomed the opportunity to come back to campus after the effects of the pandemic began to decrease, with student opinion being largely positive during an Education Zone in November 2021:

'The return to campus for Media, Film and TV has been delivered well. It has been much more productive than over Teams last year. Course mates are enjoying face to face and meeting new people on campus. Lecturers have been great also'.

### **3. Student Outcomes**

#### **EDUCATIONAL GAIN**

YSJ is home to an inclusive and welcoming university community where students from a range of backgrounds are given the opportunity to access higher education within an enriching environment. Students not only receive a degree by the end of their time at the institution, but they also gain many other skills and personal attributes, which are admittedly hard to measure and capture.

The SU consulted the part-time officers when trying to understand what the student understanding of 'educational gain' was, and they found it difficult to define the concept. However, after hosting discussions with our student officers, the SU understands 'educational gain' at YSJ as the following:

Educational gain at YSJ from a student perspective comprises the additional skills, experiences and emotional intelligence that students gain whilst studying for their degree here at the University. These additional benefits lead to changes in morals amongst students as they progress through their degree, allowing a different outlook on life upon graduation through the university's social justice agenda. For students at YSJ educational gain is underpinned by the development of self-confidence through extra-curricular activities such as sports, societies and volunteering roles facilitated by the SU and placement opportunities on degree courses.

#### **Personal, social and educational gains at YSJ**

Students are encouraged to question and change their moral standpoints by being offered the opportunity to understand others and 'become better people', developing different and positive outlooks on life. This includes opportunities for students to live and learn with others from different backgrounds and lived experiences, such as through opportunities for group work and collaborative projects, living and social environments (shared halls and facilities), clubs, societies, networks and academic groups.

There is a triangulated approach to educational gain at YSJ, between subject knowledge, development of emotional intelligence and extra-curricular activity. The SU believes that an interconnected approach linking these three elements allows students to reap the benefits of educational gain that YSJ offers. A prime example of this is within the School of Education, Language and Psychology, where interpersonal connections between students and lecturers are encouraged through informal social events held within the SU. Students are invited to meet and network with academics within their school, affording them the opportunity to enhance their subject knowledge and the ability to articulate themselves intelligently and compassionately within a social yet still academic setting. Events such as these allow students to enter the workplace and wider world with social and networking skills in addition to their disciplinary knowledge, which makes them well-rounded graduates able to compete with graduates from other universities with confidence and agility.



The academic and social offering at YSJ is based around developing self-confidence. YSJ offers students a range of extra-curricular opportunities and voluntary roles, such as becoming committee members of sports clubs and societies, part-time officers, course reps, Chairs of Schools, Students as Researchers and buddy/peer mentors. Linked to academic practice, YSJ also offers students bespoke work placements, internships, 'students as researchers' opportunities, part-time student job opportunities and careers advice and guidance. All of the above lead to students ending their degree journey as authentic individuals who have been shaped by the values that YSJ believes in so strongly and disseminates amongst the student body.

## **RETENTION, PROGRESSION AND GRADUATE OUTCOMES**

### **Retention and Progression**

YSJ has a long-standing commitment to offering education and opportunities to students from WP backgrounds, with over 75% of the student population coming from social groups that are currently underrepresented in HE. The University's Access and Participation Plan (APP) clearly sets out the aims and ambition it has for WP student groups, whilst demonstrating how the University will support all students to achieve good graduate outcomes. As of August 2022, the APP dashboard shows progress against twenty key target areas relating to recruitment (access), attainment, retention (continuation) and graduate outcomes (progression) for Disability, Ethnicity, IMD Quintile 1, Mature students and Polar 4 Quintile 1 demographics. The dashboard shows that, of the key WP/access groups, disabled students are successful at all stages of their university careers, whilst there is work to be done around students from ethnic minorities with regards to continuation and progression. YSJ received the Race Equality Charter Bronze Award in November 2022, which evidences its work on and commitment to race equality. The University has dedicated resources within its support teams to aid the recruitment, retention and success of students from underrepresented groups, including WP advisers who support mature students, care-leavers and students with asylum/refugee status, alongside disabled student support and advisers.

As initiatives to aid retention, the SU has worked with some programme teams to pilot Peer Mentoring schemes, with the aim of increasing a sense of belonging and improving student retention and satisfaction. As part of this, the SU coordinates a 'Buddy' system to pair new students with current ones who share similar social interests. The President of Education has worked closely over the past year with the PVCE, alongside peer-mentoring leads within the Schools, to gather insights into peer-mentoring practice. From this work, we have established that there are strong peer-mentoring systems in place across the University, which focus on either academic support or pastoral support for students, especially for those within key risk groups as detailed in the APP.

The University has made positive steps to aid student progression by introducing a new re-sit process, where students who fail assessments are automatically given the right to re-sit during the summer period. Students who fail assessments can access bespoke support packages to aid success, including extra tutorial time and writing support. In addition to this, over the past few years, the University has run 'Success Week' – an initiative to offer dedicated and targeted support to students who are re-sitting examinations or resubmitting assignments at the end of Semester 2. This includes dedicated study support, academic and wellbeing support, and sometimes advice about or help with alternative accommodation. Success Week is a key part of supporting student success, retention, progression and completion, recognising re-sits as a potentially stressful experience for students where specific interventions can be beneficial, if not necessary.

### **Graduate Outcomes**

YSJ's commitment to student success is evident throughout its pedagogic approach, support strategies and opportunities on offer to students. Throughout 2015–2020, YSJ saw a steady increase in students receiving 'good honours' upon graduation; moreover, the number of students receiving a first-class degree significantly rose from 15.8% in 2015/16 to 30% in 2019/20. This correlates with a reduction in students achieving lower second-class degrees, dropping from 30% in 2015/16 to 21.1% in 2019/20. This was also the trend for students from non-traditional

backgrounds; for example, disabled student outcomes rose from just under 60% in 2015/16 to just under 80% for the year 2019/20.

According to TEF data, 63.3% of YSJ students go on to further study or enter professional level employment (positive graduate outcomes). The YSJ Graduate Outcomes Survey reveals that the percentage of students gaining positive graduate outcomes has fallen over the course of three years, from 64.8% in 2017/18 to 63.3% in 2019/20. However, with regards to TEF benchmarking, the survey shows that many subject areas are just above or fall just below the TEF benchmark for positive graduate outcomes, with the subject areas of Biosciences and Education materially above the benchmark (77.9% versus 69%, and 79.7% versus 75%, respectively), and just Geography materially below it. The survey also suggests that around 70% of students remain in the geographical area of York or North Yorkshire after study, which may have an impact on the types and levels of jobs that students enter immediately after graduating. The 2021/22 Graduate Outcomes Survey also found that:

- Of the students who completed YSJ-funded internships, 100% were in employment and 93% in highly skilled employment.
- Of the students who completed placements within their programme of study, 100% were in employment and 74% in highly skilled employment.
- 81% of students over the age of 31 had positive graduate outcomes compared to 74% of age 21-30.
- 88% of students who entered highly skilled employment felt that the activity on their course was meaningful for the work that they were undertaking.

The Careers Team at YSJ works in a holistic way to integrate the 'clear about career' concept across the whole student experience. Firstly, the team offer students one-on-one or group sessions as well as consultation around CV enhancement, interview readiness, personal development and professional growth. Secondly, they have increasingly collaborated with course teams to embed careers concepts, strategies and opportunities into academic study via the co-creation of work-based project work, work placement opportunities and professional reflective practice activity. A few years ago, the Careers Team began collaboration with the SU to engage student volunteers and leaders in understanding skills acquisition and translating this into career enhancement/readiness. Meanwhile, they have been working with colleagues across the University to refresh the YSJ 'Graduate Attributes' – a framework developed to enable students to articulate the value added by their experience at YSJ, and to provide them with the means to reflect on their experiences and skills in order to identify development needs. It is hoped that the refreshed Graduate Attributes will be released during the 2022/23 academic year – more work is needed in this area, as many students are not aware of the attributes, but the University is working to integrate these attributes into key aspects of the curriculum.

#### **4. Conclusion**

We believe that YSJ is committed to providing a high-quality learning and teaching experience to students that come from a wide variety of backgrounds. The University's dedication to rigorous and continuous self-assessment of course teaching quality, academic support and student retention/progression/outcomes leads to an excellent university experience for YSJ students. Students who are less likely to access higher education are given the opportunity to succeed here at YSJ, correlating with the University's commitment to social justice, which supports local and national communities.

Student voice is highly valued at YSJ, with relationships being particularly strong between SU sabbatical officers and the University Executive Board, allowing student perspective to shape curriculum design, course delivery and course-based further opportunities. It is notable that, when asking YSJ students what makes their university experience positive, they commonly reply: 'we are a name here at YSJ, not a number'. This ethos underpins everything at YSJ and is exemplified in the University's collaborative approach to developing its learning and teaching strategy with and for all students.