

1 Our learning community at York St John University

York St John University (YSJ) is home to a supportive and intellectually rigorous academic community with a commitment to [social justice](#) and a vocation for transforming lives through education. Our [institutional Strategy 2026](#) (Fig. 1) ensures students are at the centre of all that we do, and enables us to focus our expertise, talents, and creativity to advance knowledge, promote understanding, and achieve educational outcomes for the benefit of all. This submission demonstrates how we collaborate with our students and the wider community to co-create an outstanding educational experience and excellent learning outcomes. Strategy 2026 is underpinned by strategies designed to ensure a rigorous focus on continuous improvement. Our [Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Strategy \(LTSE, 2020\)](#) and its annual action plans are guided by four themes: education for transformation; inclusive education for all; education for the future; and education enabling success in the wider world. These strategic priorities are implemented through careful curation of the student experience. Our values guide not just what we do (the priorities identified in the LTSE), but how we act. We ensure, for our community, that all continuous improvements and change are undertaken in partnership with students (our 'Student Partnership Plus' model (SP+)) and are guided by our signature pedagogy of collaboration, curiosity, compassion, and community.

| YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY STRATEGY 2026 | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| Who we are: | MISSION | | | |
| | Driven by our commitment to social justice, we focus our expertise, talents and creativity to advance knowledge, promote understanding, and achieve educational outcomes for the benefit of all. | | | |
| | VISION | | | |
| | We will extend the transformative power of university education to the communities we serve. | | | |
| | VALUES | | | |
| | Intellectually generous, curious, and rigorous | Promote fairness and challenge prejudice | Inspire and support each other to succeed | |
| What we do: | LEARNING, TEACHING AND STUDENT EXPERIENCE STRATEGY | | | |
| | Education for transformation | Inclusive education for all | Education for the future | Education enabling success in the wider world |
| How we do it: | YSJ SIGNATURE PEDAGOGY ('THE FOUR CS') | | | |
| | Collaboration | Compassion | Curiosity | Community |

Figure 1

We have a long and proud history of providing an outstanding educational experience for our students. We began as an education college in 1841, founded by the Diocese of York to train schoolteachers for under-resourced schools in impoverished communities - an early contribution to closing local skills gaps.ⁱ We were awarded our University title in 2006 and, following a period of growth and diversification, are now a thriving, multi-disciplinary educational community, with campuses in York and London attended by over 9,500 students and employing 1,200 staff, Our city-centre York campus is all on one site, with a sports park just ten minutes' walk away. We have five Schools: the School of the Arts; the School of Education, Language and Psychology; the School of Humanities; the School of Science, Technology and Health; and York Business School. Our London campus serves a growing community of postgraduate students.

Our reputation for excellence extends well beyond our founding activity of teacher training into an innovative portfolio of contemporary courses. Our [recent Ofsted inspection report](#) (March 2022) about our ITE trainees vividly expresses our pride in our students across all our courses:

'There is something special about York St John trainees. They are diligent, kind, caring and self-reflective.' This comment, from a headteacher who offers placements for trainees, is typical of those

made to inspectors. Leaders' vision is for trainees to be 'citizens not tourists' of York St John University. This is exactly what trainees experience. ...The curriculum for trainees is well considered and logical. It is delivered effectively and with passion by experts.'

In this submission, we show how we deliver excellent education across both experience and outcomes, with outstanding provision in multiple indicators, and expound our coherent strategy for educational enhancement that commands support across the University. We demonstrate the relationship between our institutional policies and practices, and our students' experiences and outcomes. Our LTSE strategy ensures outstanding learning, teaching, assessment, and student feedback across our community, and tailors our approach to ensure students succeed in and progress beyond their studies. This strategic approach builds on the distinctive YSJ experience that is so valued by our students, who have a strong sense of belonging to a rich and diverse community. Our annual LTSE action plan details our achievements and current enhancement activities; its associated working groups bring together academics, professional services staff, and students to engage in focused dialogue and collaborative work.

At YSJ, 78% of our undergraduate (UG) students have one or more demographic indicator/s that are significantly underrepresented in the English HE sector (October 2022). Over the four-year period for full-time (FT) UGs, and compared with sector averages:

- A substantially higher proportion of students report a disability,
- 34.3% of our FT students have come from TUNDRA 1 or 2 localities, compared with 22.3% national average.
- We moved from 10.5% mature student entrants in Year 1 to 14% in Year 4 for FT UGs.
- The proportion of entrants reporting as not heterosexual increased from 10.1% to 15.5% over the same timeframe, compared with a four-year sector average of 8.9% for FT UGs.

These insights motivate our commitment to inclusive education and to strong work on induction and transition into HE (LTSE 2.1).

We note the size and shape data for 2020/21 shows a low proportion of students from a Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic (BAME) background. Since 2018, a detailed process of listening to and partnership with BAME students and staff has resulted in improved experience and outcomes for all. Our progress along this long-term journey of learning and enhancement was recognised in our Race Equality Charter Bronze Award (November 2022). Our LTSE includes our ongoing work to decolonise curricula and nurture anti-racist teaching practice, and to be inclusive by design (LTSE 2.1). As a result, our latest UG recruitment cycle (2022/23) demonstrates an improving position to 14.22% in terms of our FT BAME new intake.

Through determined strategic action, we have seen significant improvements and are deeply proud of our success. **All of our overall indicators for FT students are Materially Above Benchmark (MAB) or In Line With Benchmark (ILWB), with strong positive trajectories in both aspects.** Next, we demonstrate how we have achieved these excellent results and how we plan to tailor and enhance our provision further to ensure outstanding experience and outcomes for all students.

2 The Student Experience at YSJ

Our focus on ensuring an outstanding experience for all is reflected in our excellent performance across student experience indicators. Achieving 79.3% overall satisfaction in NSS 2022 places us **30th among 122 Higher Education Institutions in England.**

2.1 Course Design and Teaching

We deliver consistently high-quality teaching and have achieved significant improvements over the four-year period. Overall, we are ILWB, and, in the fourth year, MAB for 'the teaching on my course' indicator. Our commitment to excellence in teaching shows an outstanding trajectory of performance. We are currently:

- **Top North-East English university for Teaching and Academic Support (2022 NSS)**
- **The highest-rated university in the North of England for teaching quality in *The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2023***

This is reinforced by internal student surveys across our UG population. Our 'Student Voice Review' (SVR) survey ran once per semester between semester 2 of the 2019/20 academic year and semester 2 of the 2020/21 academic year, using a Likert scale. Students were extremely positive about the effectiveness of teaching methods, scoring 4.1

3.95

and 3.99

Likewise, for overall

satisfaction on the quality of teaching, students rated us 4.1, 4.02 and 4.05 respectively. The SVR was replaced in the 2021/22 academic year by a single annual survey, the YSJ Experience Survey (YES) covering all UGs except final year students). In 2021/22, 82.6% of students were satisfied overall with the quality of teaching.ⁱⁱ Our UG responses to the International Student Barometer (ISB) 2021

rated overall satisfaction at 98%

and 100% satisfaction for our expert

lecturers

We have sustained this excellence by drawing on our values and signature pedagogy to create curricula that work in partnership with and serve our local community (2.1.1); embed compassion and social justice throughout our learning, teaching, and research (2.1.2); stimulate curiosity by drawing on our excellent research (2.1.3); are collaboratively designed and monitored outstanding academic programmes (2.1.4); invest in and provide outstanding support for professional development (2.1.5); participate actively in leading good practice across the sector (2.1.6); and reward excellent teaching (2.1.7).

2.1.1 Community-oriented curricula

We have a superb relationship with our local and regional communities, and we support and learn from each other in continuous knowledge exchange. Our award-winning 'Converge' project is a partnership with the Tees, Esk & Wear Valley (TEWV) NHS Mental Health Trust, and offers high-quality educational opportunities to mental ill health-experienced adults in order to aid recovery, wellbeing, and promote social mobility through learning. University staff and students work across disciplines and in partnership with commissioned artists to provide participant support.

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contributing to Converge, students gain a deeper understanding of mental health and grow in confidence and interpersonal skills, including communication, leadership, and collaboration.^{iv}

Our expanding health portfolio is created in partnership TEWV and also with the York and Scarborough Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. Our work with the latter involves cross-institutional training and research, three full-time Health Services Research Fellowships and seven Clinical Research Fellowships. Biosciences, Allied Health, and Nursing students gain cutting-edge knowledge and lab skills, feeding into outstanding indicators for experience and progression in these areas (see below).

We are also part of the Yorkshire and Humber Institute of Technology: a consortium of universities, FE colleges, and employers established to enhance students' training and employability skills in relation to engineering/manufacturing, agri-tech, and digital industries. YSJ leads on local school outreach for the Institute. Examples of how collaboration challenges students in both Design and Computer Science to achieve their best work are shared on [the Institute's website](#).^v We work in partnership with [Aesthetica](#) magazine's annual Short

These partnerships link curriculum design and delivery to civic needs, and fulfil our commitment to developing our curricula in dialogue with external partners, industry, and public bodies (LTSE 4.2). This creates a powerful sense of belonging to a scholarly and city-wide community evidenced by students' response to the **2022 NSS question: 'I feel part of a community of staff and students.'** For this question, YSJ is **8.3 percentage points (pp) above the OfS benchmark**. This is paralleled in YES Survey question 10 showing 80% satisfaction

This in turn contributes to the outstanding continuation and completion rates discussed in section 3.

2.1.2 Embedding Social Justice

We have increased our focus on social-justice-themed, research-led teaching through commitments to embed UN Sustainable Development Goals (LTSE 4.2) and decolonise curricula (LTSE 2.1). We recognise that one of our greatest impacts in relation to social justice is achieved through the education choices and careers of our graduates. We have worked with [Refugee Action York](#) for more than ten years and were accredited as a [University of Sanctuary](#) in 2018. We offer sanctuary scholarships, support refugees and asylum seekers in our community, and undertake pioneering research projects and curricular activities drawing on the lived experience of displaced persons.

Our [Institute for Social Justice](#) (ISJ) develops impactful research that addresses inequalities, injustices, and societal challenges. Activities include an annual [student graduate prize](#) in social justice and events to showcase students' activities, contributing to their development of [graduate attributes](#) including being 'community minded, aware of global perspectives and embracing of difference.'^{vi} A second research institute, focused on health and care improvement, will extend our commitment to research with an impact on social justice.

2.1.3 Research-led curricula

Our strategic focus on research-informed curricula (LTSE 3.1) has substantially increased over the past four years. In the 2021 Research Excellence Framework, we had **4* world-leading research in every School**, boosted the proportion of 3*+ research outputs from 35% to 58%, and increased the number of staff submitted from 68.2FTE to 160.6FTE. All research-active staff are expected to teach UGs (LTSE 3.1), ensuring our students benefit from current research insights. Embedding our research into curriculum design contributes to a trajectory of increasing intellectual stretch and challenge, enabling students to achieve their fullest potential. Since 2019, we have improved from -0.4pp below sector average to **3.3pp above for NSS q 3 (intellectual stimulation)**, supported by internal surveys, with SVR showing 4.2 (Semester 2 2019/20), 4.16 (Semester 1 2020/21), and 4.23 (Semester 2 2020/21), and 85.1% YES 2021/22. We also increased from 0.5pp below average to **2.8pp above sector average for NSS q 4 (staff challenging our students to do their best work)**. The YES score for this question was 82% in 2021/22. External examiners frequently commend the strength and innovation of our research-informed teaching: in 2019/20 the examiner for BA English Literature noted '[Optional] modules are an excellent example of the department's commitment to research-led and research-informed teaching and demonstrate the strengths of the department that inform the delivery of its ethos.'^{vii} Research and scholarship similarly inform teaching across all areas. In 2020/21, the BSc Sports Science external examiner called our approach to research-informed teaching in second year 'exemplary' in its focus on improving our students' employability skills.^{viii}

2.1.4 Collaboratively designing and monitoring outstanding academic programmes

Our new approach to course design and approval is underpinned by the LTSE and our signature pedagogy. In 2020, we deployed a new Strategic Portfolio Committee (SPC), which brings together senior academic and

professional services colleagues to ensure a future-facing portfolio that is faithful to our Strategy 2026, whilst taking account of our research strengths and of local/regional skills gaps. For example:

- New Adult Nursing, Mental Health Nursing, and Paramedic Science degrees were launched in 2020 and 2022. SPC oversaw a £3.2m investment (£2m from a successful capital funding application to OfS) in new Nursing and Paramedic Science simulation wards and supporting facilities, operational since September 2022. Our MAB indicators demonstrate how this strategic approach results in outstanding academic experience, enabling students to progress into areas of local and national skill shortage. A further investment of £4.6m is planned over the next two years to launch Radiography and Operating Department Practice programmes (again supported by OfS capital funding).
- Our new LLM Legal Practice programme (2021) was created to provide meaningful progression opportunities for our undergraduates. It aims to increase access to the legal profession for students from underrepresented backgrounds. Our students develop key legal skills via work experience in the YSJ Law Clinic, offering advice and assistance to people and small businesses in financial need.

We sustain a data-led approach to portfolio health to make certain that we identify our strengths and weaknesses. Since 2017, school-specific dashboards have provided data drawn from a wide variety of sources, including UCAS, NSS, external student-experience surveys (PRES, Graduate Outcomes (GO)), and continuation, completion, and attainment data. These are discussed at School- and directorate-level and reviewed regularly by our Executive Board (EB). These meetings create accountability for student experience and outcomes and help us to establish a culture of data literacy that underpins curriculum enhancement.

We have adopted an impact-driven and data-informed approach to annual monitoring and review (LTSE 1.2). The Programme Review and Enhancement (PRE) process enables subject teams to share good practice and identify improvements. For example:

- Our Computer Science programmes were re-validated in 2022 after our PRE process identified lower levels of satisfaction for teaching and learning resources, and emerging continuation challenges. A subsequent curriculum review, with significant input from alumni, employers, and current students, was influential in planning our new Creative Centre. Specialist equipment and space for Computer Science is integral to the Centre (see 'learning resources' below). Further facilities are being created to link our Computer Science and Design portfolios through a new £5.1m virtual and augmented reality hub and a £700k high-performance computer lab (partially OfS capital funded). We have also invested in new technical staff to support students' lab activities. We are progressing through the [British Computer Society's](#) accreditation process to benchmark high-quality provision and support staff development.
- Our one other MBB subject area for teaching is Languages and Area Studies, where we currently teach four programmes with a compulsory year abroad. These four-year, single-honours programmes were introduced in 2019 after a significant refresh in response to student feedback concerning the lack of coherence provided by the previous joint-honours, three-year programmes. 2023 will be our first year of NSS feedback from students on these new programmes, but first-year students' satisfaction with their teaching - as measured by the 2021/22 YES data was at 83.%, paralleling our benchmark indicator of 83.7%.^{ix}

2.1.5 Investing in, rewarding, and developing staff practice

We **increased investment in academic staff from £18.441m in 2018/19 to £25.855m in 2022/23** to improve staff-student ratios, fund academic promotions, and deliver excellent teaching, assessment, and feedback crafted to our students' needs. Investment in our technical/professional services staff has also been significantly increased, from £15.260m in 2018/19 to £24.589m in 2022/23.

YSJ achieves amongst the highest levels of recognition for teaching and learning support in the sector. In 2021/22, **98% of our academic staff were Fellows of the Higher Education Academy** (an increase from 86% in 2017/18), compared to 46% in the sector. This included **Senior and four Principal Fellows**,

Achievement of Fellowship is fundamentally based on staff partnership (LTSE 1.3). Our experiential pathway is highly innovative in its use of ongoing mentoring arrangements and professional dialogues; similarly, we are piloting Action Learning Sets or 'mentoring circles' to support early-career academic staff engaging with our new developmental route to Fellowship (launched 2022).

We also operate an institutional 'Learning & Teaching Partnership' scheme for all teaching staff in place of traditional, episodic 'teaching observations. Colleagues are paired for the whole academic year and hold a series of discussions, observations, and/or teaching collaborations, ensuring the collaborative exchange of developmental feedback becomes routine. Our CPD programme supports our signature pedagogy while responding rapidly to cross-sector priorities. Whilst our overall TEF Student Experience measures for assessment feedback are already MAB (6.2pp), our commitment to continuous improvement means our CPD offer stretches our excellent practice further. In 2021, we engaged international experts in feedback and authentic assessment to run CPD workshops: 47-59 (12-15%) of our established academic staff attended, with more engaging with materials and recordings later. In 2021/22, our broader thematic focus was decolonising the curriculum. Several well-attended events were held, during which colleagues shared YSJ- and sector-best practice, feeding back on the impact on their practice. This work continues with further events and training, planned and funded via our Race Equality Charter implementation plan.

Based on feedback from our Students' Union (SU) Sabbatical Officers and colleagues, we know that the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown measures continue to have repercussions for student wellbeing, confidence, engagement, and success. We are therefore running a series of CPD events to help colleagues support students, drawing on our signature pedagogy of compassion and community, and our strategic commitment to a 'whole university approach to mental health.'. These include sessions equipping academics with new approaches to compassionate pedagogy, increased academic tutor provision, and a focus on building student resilience. Our annual 'Talk About Teaching' conference - taking place in-person in February 2023, for the first time since the pandemic - will also explore these themes. Current bookings indicate around a quarter of our academics will attend. Feedback on our central CPD programme is positive, with academic staff reporting high levels of impact on their teaching. Our CPD Session Impact Evaluation monitoring for the year 2021/22 showed 96% of attendees who left feedback 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that 'the event was good value in relation to the time spent attending it.'

Outstanding teaching and assessment practices are embedded in every School. Each School Academic Leadership Team (SALT) includes a Learning and Teaching Lead (LTL) who co-ordinates the implementation of central initiatives for curriculum enhancement. They support colleagues at all career stages, co-ordinate peer learning, and drive forward working groups implementing the LTSE. Local CPD provision is also vibrant within academic Schools. In September 2021, the LTL for the School of Education, Language and Psychology designed and hosted a week-long CPD event in partnership with the Teaching and Learning Enhancement team. Sessions on tutoring and on technology-enhanced, in-person teaching contributed to improved 2022 NSS overall satisfaction results in Education and Teaching, Counselling, and English Studies, with Psychology maintaining the same excellent results as 2021. 'Teaching on my course' improved 17.9pp for Counselling between NSS 2021 and 2022. 'Academic Support' improved 15.5pp for Counselling and 17.2pp for Education and Teaching.

At YSJ, we build communities of practice that support inclusive teaching excellence. Research into Professional Practice in Learning and Education (RIPPLE) is a cross-university network of academic and professional service staff engaged in pedagogic research as a form of critical engagement with their practice. Monthly breakfast cafés provide opportunities for colleagues to present research outcomes or discuss recent scholarship. The RIPPLE network currently has over 100 members across all departments, including the Disability Support and Inclusion team, Wellbeing and Welfare, Library and Learning Services, Research Office, Study Support, as well as academics from across the schools. Cross-university research projects and developments, informed by discussions at RIPPLE, include interventions related to academic tutoring, decolonisation of the curriculum, accessibility, and authentic assessment.

2.1.6 Sector-leading practice

The success of our exceptional levels of recognition against the Professional Standards Framework (PSF) is mirrored by our active involvement with the Framework at international level. Our Pro Vice Chancellor: Education (PVCE) is a member of the Advance HE Strategic Advisory Group on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and has contributed his expertise to the international Steering Group overseeing the first major revision of the PSF for more than a decade.

We have a significant influence on practice in the sector. Our Associate Head for Biosciences and interim Head of Teaching and Learning Enhancement (HoTLE) won a Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence in 2021.

YSJ is a member of a QAA-funded collaborative enhancement project to develop an Inclusive Curriculum Framework (led by the University of Hull). YSJ staff are responsible for producing an online toolkit to support the Framework, to be launched to the sector in 2023. We are committed to embedding this Framework into our pedagogy from 2023 onwards, to continue to deliver on our commitment to inclusive practice. In 2021/22, YSJ academics were members of three QAA Subject Benchmark Statement revision groups: Biosciences; Counselling and Psychotherapy; and Languages, Cultures and Societies.

Our staff's shared passion for high-quality learning, teaching, and assessment is a key driver in our high levels of staff satisfaction. In our most recent staff survey (2020/21), **93% of respondents said they feel proud to work for the University** (up from 86% in 2018/19), and 91% felt their work gives them a sense of personal achievement (up from 86% in 2018).

2.1.7 Rewarding excellent teaching

Our LTSE Strategy (1.3) commits the University to rewarding teaching excellence and, in 2020, we refreshed our academic promotions pathway for Senior Lecturer, Associate Professor, and Professor. Applicants are required to meet both Research and Learning and Teaching criteria, with one designated as a primary focus. Since 2020, from our total number of established academic staff we have promoted colleagues to Senior Lecturer to Associate Professor and to Professor. We run annual promotion workshops and advice sessions, including events delivered in partnership with staff groups including YSJ Women and our BAME Staff Network in order to fulfil our strategic commitments to support more staff from these groups to gain promotion. We note the increase in demand for engagement at the Senior Fellowship level, which has escalated since the Academic Promotion Policy was more clearly aligned with Descriptor 3 of the PSF.

The positive impact of these strategic actions on our students' experience of learning is demonstrated by NSS scores of 86.5% satisfaction for **'the teaching on my course'** in 2020, which - after a COVID-related dip to 80.6% in 2021 - improved again to 83.9% in 2022. Our 2022 score was **3.5pp higher than the OfS benchmark**.

2.2 Assessment

YSJ has a comprehensive, rigorous, and principle-led approach to assessment. This is evidenced by our overall indicator, which is **100% MAB at 6.2pp above benchmark**.

We are also **MAB for the majority of our split-level indicators**: male students, students with a declared disability, mature students aged 21-30, Asian students, Black students and those from IMD Quintiles 1 and 2. All students report satisfaction in relation to assessment that is considerably above benchmark, and point to an outstanding culture of assessment in terms of rigour, quality, fairness, and inclusivity. We have no split indicators that are MBB for assessment and feedback.

Our 'Principles of Assessment' were approved in 2021 and include a commitment to the cross-institutional development of authentic assessment to link graduate attributes and employability with self-actualisation and confidence (LTSE 4.3). Examples include integration of placements and project-based assessments across the School of the Arts, anthology publication in Creative Writing, web design in Media and Film Studies, and policy papers and presentations in Politics. Authentic assessment is scaffolded through authentic experiential learning. For example, before undertaking objective structured clinical examinations (OSCEs), our paramedic science students undertake live simulations of large-scale clinical incidents collaborating with policing, drama, journalism, occupational therapy students, and local emergency services. Authentic assessment in Allied Health includes research projects working with asylum seekers, while students leading a Young People's Coaching Project work in conjunction with YSJ's Counselling and Mental Health Clinic. This range of authentic assessment also contributes to our outstanding completion rates and increasingly positive graduate outcomes.

Our LTLs led the roll out of our refreshed Generic Assessment Descriptors in 2018. These grade-related criteria establish consistency across programmes and promote bespoke marking criteria that reflect disciplinary differences and local assessment contexts. They have enabled heightened and impactful use of assessment exemplars and improved communication of assessment expectations to students. The overall impact of these changes can be seen in very strong student responses to 2022 NSS questions, including:

- 74.2% for 'The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance' - up 1.2pp (73% in 2021)
- 75.6% for 'Marking and assessment has been fair' - up 3.6pp (72% in 2021)
- 80.4% for 'Feedback has been timely' - up 6.4pp (74% in 2021)
- 78.3% for 'I have received helpful comments' - up 3.3pp (75% in 2021)

Sector wide, assessment and feedback has historically resisted significant or quick improvement,^{xi} so these outcomes are testimony to how effectively our academics use 'assessment for learning' and progressive feed-forward. They demonstrate the care we put into using assessment as a form of academic dialogue. The results signal a key area of educational strategy made concrete through networked leadership and sensitive local deployment over a four-year period.

Our 15 working day marking turnaround, introduced in 2014/15 and first influencing NSS in 2017, has been very well-received by students. Responses to the statement **'feedback on my work has been timely' are now 80.41% 15.1pp above OfS benchmark of 65.3%** (2022 NSS); this is especially satisfying given the pandemic amplified the importance of providing prompt and flexible academic guidance and support. Scores in SVR were strong at 4.2 (Semester 1 2019/20) 4.08 (Semester 1 2020/21) and 4.21 (Semester 2 2020/21), and in YES 79.6%.

Further examples of our dynamic assessment innovation and process include:

- Geography students co-designing, debating, and then implementing experimental formats of assessment in their modules, often using co-created learning resources.
- Developmental use of feedback by students in the Business School, who undertake a reflective assessment responding directly to the feedback provided in their preceding, substantive assessments.
- Bespoke interactive cover sheets in the Schools of Humanities and Education, Language and Psychology, on which students detail previous feedback, list subsequent actions, and request feedback for specific areas of development.

Our strong outcomes are driven by continuous improvement in practice, but also by staff research expertise in assessment and feedback. YSJ colleagues regularly publish, present at conferences, and work with other providers to lead assessment excellence in the sector.

We introduced anonymous marking in 2021 following a successful pilot (LTSE 2.1). This extension to already robust mechanisms for ensuring fair marking was instituted as a direct response to student feedback; it was a particularly prominent theme in focus groups and surveys engaging BAME students in our Race Equality Charter work. This development solidified our strong performance in NSS q. 9 (on the **fairness of marking**), from 2.6pp above sector average in 2019 to **5.6pp above average in 2022**.

2.3 Academic support

Our students rate their academic support extremely highly, as evidenced by **our consistently MAB scores: the second highest overall in the TEF workbook of providers**. We hold the **highest MAB score of universities in the Cathedrals Group and the highest MAB score amongst universities in the North East**. We pride ourselves on providing an outstanding suite of support mechanisms, and many students tell us this is why they choose to study with us. Our approach is personalised, transparent, and highly effective, designed to encourage independent learning in a safe and student-centred environment. Given our social-justice mission, it is particularly important to us that we are MAB for the following splits: mature students; disabled students; students who were eligible for Free School Meals; students with Indicators of Multiple Deprivation Quintiles 1 and 2 (most deprived); and in Asian and 'Mixed' Ethnicity categories. Our CAH2 data for Academic Support is impressive, with over half of our 20 subject areas MAB. Our pedagogy of collaboration, curiosity, compassion, and community, and our strategic commitment to meaningful individual and group tutorials (LTSE 3.2), ensures that **no split indicator is MBB**. Our integrated and personalised approach to academic support across schools and student success and learning services (including Wellbeing, Disability, Careers, Library, and Study Support) guarantees that each student is a name, not a number. This positively benefits both student success and outcomes.

Our outstanding academic support indicators stem from our personalised tutorial offer.c. The ISB 2021 rated satisfaction with personal tutors at 100% (sector average 94%). Through the interaction of our staff with [the professional development curriculum provided by UKAT](#), we have distributed our expertise across the entire range of disciplinary cohorts. As a founding UKAT member, we can draw on and contribute to sector-wide excellence in this area. Our Senior Lecturer in Academic Practice is a committee member, assessor, and a Recognised Practitioner in Advising (RPA). Since 2020, five YSJ staff have gained UKAT's RPA status, with another three currently preparing applications, and three colleagues have gained Recognised Senior Practitioner status, with one more preparing an application.

Our learner-analytics system, Engage, represents a major development in our student support. The tool was piloted in 2018/19, fully launched in 2019/20, with further enhancements post-pandemic. Engage informs personalised supportive conversations focused on student engagement data (attendance, VLE access, learning resource use, patterns of library use). The system allows staff to record and share notes from tutorials, and to keep track of students' developmental needs. Effective cross-referral from tutors to wellbeing or other support services creates a cohesive approach to student support across YSJ. We recognise mental health as a significant factor in student withdrawals, with timely intervention key to maintaining our excellent continuation and completion rates.

In addition to academic support from subject-specific colleagues, our Student Success and Learning Services directorate along with our SU provide an extensive range of services to complement academic provision:

- Academic liaison librarians provide high-quality academic research and study workshops, with our 2021/22 Library Survey revealing that 95% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: 'This library session increased my study confidence.'
 - The Study Development team offer a student-centred portfolio of support including bespoke tutorials, themed workshops, and study retreats across the academic year.
 - Our Digital Training team support software training and assistive technologies, offering individual and group training courses focused on skills-based learning, such as working with video and survey and data analysis.
 - Our Disability Support and Inclusion team facilitate innovation in inclusive learning, teaching, and assessment practice, making sure timely and effective anticipatory measures are standard practice. They support individual Learning Support Plans ensuring reasonable adjustments are made to learning and assessment as necessary.
 - We have invested in Health Assured online provision, allowing students access to online counselling and resources.
 - We have also expanded budgets across Wellbeing and Disability teams
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- Our Chaplaincy supports students one-to-one and makes connections to build community both within and beyond YSJ and the region, as this sense of belonging is integral to student retention.
 - Our sector-leading 'trans inclusive framework' was runner up in the 2018 Guardian Student Experience Awards. Our Centre for Religion in Society conducted research, funded by the Church Universities Fund, which identified practical steps to ensure [Church-foundation universities can serve as safe-spaces to establish full and unconditional belonging for trans and non-binary students](#).

In conjunction with our Student Casework Manager and Associate Heads of School, our SU provides a comprehensive and independent 'Academic Advice Service,' including offering advice on suspending or stopping study, academic misconduct, complaints, and appeals. We continue to build on our outstanding academic support and have planned an investment of more than £3.7m in 2022/23 in additional academic and professional services staff to provide enhanced levels of support for our students. This is alongside upcoming capital investment in a campus-based Student Support Hub (2023) to offer a joined-up, central point of access for all dimensions of academic, welfare, and developmental support.

2.4 Learning Resources

The quality of our learning resources is underpinned by a 'Digital First' approach, which prioritises digital accessibility, involves students in acquiring and creating learning materials, and widens the definition of 'learning resources' to capture our campus infrastructure and civic community. The success of this approach is evidenced by our overall ILWB indicator.

Our positive trajectory, showing significant progress in the fourth year (in which we are MAB), is demonstrated by excellent scores on the 2022 NSS 'learning resources' questions, including: 85.8% agreement that 'The library resources (e.g., books, online services and learning spaces) have supported my learning well' (q. 19)

Internal survey data also demonstrates high levels of satisfaction with learning resources. Students rated the access they had to resources at 4.3 in semester 2 of 2019/20 SVR. This continued in 2020/21 with 4.12 in (Semester 1) and 4.15 in (Semester 2). 87% of students were satisfied with library resources (YES 2021/22). 85.4% agreement that 'I have been able to access course-specific resources (e.g., equipment, facilities, software, collections) when I needed to' (q. 20)

2.4.1 Digital First Approach

In 2020, we refreshed our Digital Strategy, supported by a **significant capital investment of £13m in our digital infrastructure between 2019 and 2026**. Students have been involved from the outset, sitting on the Digital Strategy Steering Group and contributing to digital change projects and policies. We see evidence of this impact in the 2022 NSS score for q.18 ('The IT resources and facilities have supported my learning well') of 80% agreement,

As part of our social-justice mission, we are committed to supporting students who work in digital poverty (in terms of hardware, internet access, or broader restrictions pertaining to the digital study environment). Digital poverty worsened during the pandemic, and we swiftly implemented material support: in March 2020, the University contacted all students about their ability to work remotely and supported 117 students with access to hardware and Wi-Fi, ensuring they were able to participate fully in online learning. Our Library continues to open 24/7, offering a kitchen and warm spaces where our students can eat and relax. We see student involvement evidenced in our Future Learning Spaces programme. Always in dialogue with our students, we heard a significant request for lecture recording to be established for in-person teaching. As a direct result, we have invested £875,000 to establish recording of lectures by default (a programme which now sees 100% of our lecture-sized teaching spaces benefiting from this functionality). In developing this approach, we benefited from student representation on the project's steering board, advising on recording priorities, consent, student usability, and accessibility.

Our **eBook investment increased by 64% between 2018 and 2021** (from £201,451 to £329,807) as a result of student feedback. Between 2019/20 and 2020/21, student access to eBook resources increased by 67%, and students' most used titles are purchased for perpetual access at the end of each subscription period. This student-led approach to the acquisition of library content represented approximately 20% of the Library's purchased eBook content in 2021. Our responsive approach to library collection investment has promoted areas currently showing as MBB in the dashboard. Politics is -8.8pp MBB but has improved markedly in the two years of NSS data available for this new subject in YSJ's portfolio. **NSS q.19 (library resources) improved dramatically to 81.3% in 2022**, and **q.20 (specialist resources) improved to 67.2%.**

We prioritise the accessibility of our resources and deploy Moodle Ally across our VLE and internal digital collections (LTSE 2.1). Our impact in this area is signalled by our successes in the annual ['Fix your Content' Ally challenge](#), where we came **first out of all participating HEIs in Europe in 2020 and 2021, and second in Europe in 2022.**

2.4.2 Adapting learning spaces

Comments from our students in the 2021 NSS highlighted the importance of the physical library. Changes to library layout and extended opening hours were made to address this feedback in August 2021. Our subsequent internal Library Survey indicated that these changes had a rapid and positive impact on the student experience,

Library survey feedback has prompted us to increase the range of study spaces, including social spaces for group work.^{xii} Beyond surveys, informal student feedback is categorised and monitored each month allowing for quick diagnosis and response. Our agile response to feedback given through our Library 'feedback wall' has increased the availability of quiet study space (March 2020) and established a new booking system (2021). This pragmatic, student-centred approach characterises our service and explains our outstanding indicators in this area.

2.4.3 Campus Space and Student Voices

On our city-centre campus in York, we have co-created a revitalised built environment that supports learning and belonging for our students, staff, and local communities. Over the refurbishment period (2016-22), NSS student satisfaction in relation to course-specific resources has risen from 80% to 85.4%. We give our students direct agency in the strategic evolution of our learning spaces and campus design. Students are members of project boards for new buildings, including our Creative Centre, which opened in 2022 and represents an investment in our campus of over £18m. The Creative Centre provides a permanent new home for the University's Music and Computer Science courses, featuring specialist spaces for performance, Creative Writing, and Media Production, as well as a variety of informal study spaces, and an environment that promotes inclusivity and wellbeing. This ambitious project sought to directly address MBB scores for learning resources in both Computing and Creative Arts and Design. The Creative Centre has already had a positive impact on student experience, with **NSS q. 20 (specialist resources)** (rising from 51.9% in 2021 to 76.3% in 2022) and **for Creative Arts and Design** (rising from 58.5% to 84%). We also received outstanding scores for our first-year students on the 2021/22 YSJ YES survey learning resources questions, including 85.5% for Design and 90.2% for Fine Art

The Creative Centre has won two York Design awards in the Community and Sustainability categories, and acts as a model for the way we design and open the campus as a learning resource. The collaborative design process has helped us design and build new Geosciences labs and Counselling suites, and is currently being deployed to plan new learning spaces for students on our Allied Health and Nursing programmes (a total investment of £7.8m over two phases between 2020 and 2025) as well as our new digital design hub (at a cost of £5.1m between 2022 and 2025).

2.4.4 Community as learning resource

Our values mean that our priority is to engage our students in transformative learning experiences that contribute to the wider community. For example, Occupational Therapy staff and students work on university-owned and -managed community allotments in association with Refugee Action York, whilst students and staff

on our Sport and Physiotherapy programmes collaborate with York hospital on a rehabilitation service. This rehab service is a focus for research collaboration and funding and offers opportunities for practical student and staff involvement. Dr David Yates, Consultant Anaesthetist at York Hospital, comments:

It's one thing being told by a surgeon or anaesthetist that you need to get fitter, lighter, healthier before surgery, but we all know it's another thing actually doing it! This service will help patients to take some control of their own treatment and surgical outcome and put themselves in the best possible position to have their procedure.

2.5 Students' voices

We excel in privileging our students' voices, recognising that these are myriad and diverse (LTSE 1.1). Through our **SP+** approach, we elicit, respond to, and value our students' perspectives on their learning. Our students appreciate the way partnership is embedded across our activities, demonstrated by our being **above benchmark for staff valuing students' views** about their course (NSS 2022, q. 24). Overall, we are **MAB for the 'student voice' indicator**, with a very positive trajectory in the fourth year, during which we worked more closely than ever with our students. In 12 out of 21 subject areas, we are MAB. We rank **third highest overall in the Cathedrals Group of providers, and first in the North East**.

Our commitment to partnership is evidenced in our dialogic approach to working with students on their feedback, including discussion of key actions in subject 'dialogue days' and subject- and School-level student panel meetings. Student feedback from internal surveys (SVR and YES), and externally benchmarked surveys (NSS, PTES, PRES) features prominently in our data-driven annual PRE process, generating detailed action plans for improvement at course level. University-level changes based on student feedback include a clear commitment to in-person teaching, the rollout of lecture recording, the adoption of anonymous marking practices, extra careers support for the class of 2020, and an extended provision of academic tutorials.

We recognise that Business Management is currently an outlier in our data, at 5.4pp below our benchmark for 'Student Voice.' Increased dialogue and clarity of response to YES and NSS surveys have generated improved perceptions that **'staff value students' views and opinions about the course' (NSS q. 24, which has increased 14.7pp from 59.9% in 2021 to 74.6% in 2022)**. To ensure students are aware how feedback leads to action, York Business School has increased the number of direct feedback conversations with Associate Deans and the Dean, embedded live feedback mechanisms into VLE sites to enable students to provide feedback and see rapid responses from staff.

Across the Schools, we have co-designed a consistent approach to eliciting feedback and strategic input from our students. We undertake a range of baseline measures familiar across the sector, including:

- Programme representatives, who are appointed or elected for all courses
 - Liberation Officers within the SU who work with colleagues across the University to offer input into areas of curriculum design and student experience.
 - Monthly one-to-one meetings
- there is also a SU - EB meeting every six weeks.

However, we routinely go well beyond this baseline. In line with our SP+ model, students are not only members of university committees, but are decision makers central to strategic developments for experience and outcomes, social-justice work, governance committees, recruitment, reward and recognition of staff, and designing student voice mechanisms. Examples of this important work include:

- Developing our LTSE strategy in close partnership, including having SU sabbatical officers as both full members and co-convenors of our action plan working groups.
- Refreshing our Graduate Attributes (2022) and involving students on the working group and focus groups.

- Students shaping institutional frameworks and initiatives including YSJ's Access and Participation Plan, Athena SWAN, Race Equality Charter, Trans Inclusive Network, Black History Month, and Decolonisation and Race Equality Network.
- Student membership of the Board of Governors and its sub-committees;
- Inviting students to participate in academic recruitment processes, and serve as discussion panel members in appointing senior roles including to EB.
- Launching a new, SU-led scheme (2021).
- Our Strategic Student Survey Steering Group (SSSSG) is co-chaired by the SU President of Education. Working together to reduce the YSJ Experience Survey (YES) to a course-focused annual survey to combat survey fatigue: student members guided survey timings and marketing campaigns, developed a programme of incentives, and influenced the questions set; they informed student guidance around unconscious bias in survey responses, and shaped a question addressing the University's curricular commitment to social justice.

Elected student School Chairs work closely with Heads of School and School Operations Managers. They are *ex officio* members of School Quality Panels (SQPs), placing them at the centre of decision making on course design and validation, scheduling of assessment, and approval of PRE action plans. Students are invited to attend SALT meetings where the YES results are shared. Our Staff-Student Engagement meetings provide regular course- and School-level dialogue and action planning based on YES feedback.

Both course revalidation and School-based periodic review processes routinely include student focus groups, to ensure curriculum and pedagogy are responsive to student feedback. 'Design narratives' produced during course development attest to the impact of student consultation. Feedback from students in BA History (2019/20) and BA War Studies (2019/20) led to new first-year modules and structuring of module choice, and resulted in more bespoke study skills provision. Feedback expedited the modifying of BA Religion courses from a focus on beliefs and practices to concentrating on contemporary issues and the impact of religion (BA Religion 2020/21). The substantial changes in curriculum for BSc Computer Science (2021/22, see Course Design above) were shaped by surveys of the current cohorts.^{xiii}

Students provide feedback on their experience of their academic programmes and modules. We undertake mid-module evaluations to ensure students participate in iterative module enhancements. These evaluations also ensure staff can see the immediate impact of the changes they make.

Our strategic commitments to SP+ (LTSE 1.1), and to rigorous research-informed teaching and curricula (LTSE 3.1) combine in our longstanding '[Students as Researchers' programme](#)'. Created in 2006, this programme is a key feature of our collaborative ethos in which students per year are appointed as paid research assistants and collaborators on cutting-edge staff research students have benefitted from the scheme, working on around 20 projects per year. The impact of this on our research environment is matched by a growth in skills and confidence among student partners, many of whom have gained experience of presenting at conferences or co-publishing with academics.

Similarly, in our recent pilot study to explore our students' views on how they conceptualise 'educational gain' (see Educational Gain section below), interactions with academic staff were regularly highlighted in answer to the question about how students think they learn at YSJ.

Whilst representing informal, qualitative evidence, these kinds of comments demonstrate what is absolutely core to our YSJ community and its values: the way that our students feel welcomed, known, heard, and

respected. Our SU have kindly shared their TEF submission with us, which also strongly emphasises the range and impact of our SP+ model.

3 Student outcomes at YSJ

3.1 Continuation and Completion

We are determined that all students have the best possible chance of completing their UG degree. Evidence of our strong achievement against this ambition is provided by our overall continuation and completion indicators, which are within or partially MAB. We are ILWB for continuation and 2.5pp above benchmark for completion. We know that our students' academic confidence stems from developing a strong connection with their programme, the wider University, and the City of York.^{xiv} We lay the foundations for this sense of belonging through our excellent induction and transition provision, and continue to foster it throughout our students' journey from admission to alumni. We create a friendly, inclusive, and supportive community that sustains high completion. The strength of our encouraging and intellectually stretching academic experience allows students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies.

3.1.1 Induction and transition

A standout feature of our induction and transition programme is the Welcome Week we host for all students at the start of each academic year. This week of events provides opportunities for students to meet, connect and reconnect, make friends, and become part of the YSJ community. Mindful of the uncertainties and concerns that can arise for students as they transition between levels of study, we provide dedicated 'welcome back' events and activities, which re-establish belonging and remind students of the rigorous academic expectations of their year ahead in confidence-building and compassionate ways.

For first years, we offer a whole-cohort induction module on our VLE, 'YSJForYou,' co-created with students to provide an accessible orientation, with sections outlining what to expect whilst studying at university, how to develop academic and digital skills, advice on living in York, as well as 'student takeaway' advice videos they can revisit at any time. 'YSJForYou' aims to ensure that all students are aware from the start where they can obtain support and how they can develop key skills throughout their degree. In Welcome Week 2021, there were 3023 views, with many students returning to view multiple times for a total of 15,240 views in the first half of the first semester.^{xv} Students feed back that the module provides 'Lots of information about everything you need to know when starting university.'^{xvi}

At YSJ, induction is part of the whole learning journey for our students. Student feedback and withdrawal data over the reporting period demonstrated the need for 're-engagement' events at the start of Semester 2, organised by each subject area. Drama, for example, bring all their students together to watch and report back on all levels of practical assessment, and offer a reminder of key features of the University's support networks.

3.1.2 Underrepresented groups

We run tailored induction programmes for underrepresented groups, which include socials, campus tours, student support drop-ins, digital training, and study skills workshops. For mature students, we foster a sense of belonging and encourage them to get involved with campus life. We have a dedicated Widening Participation (WP) team who offer one-to-one appointments for mature students, commuting students, and student-parents. The WP team has a notice board, email bulletin, and regular drop-ins throughout the year. There is also a mature student officer in the SU. The impact of this dedicated provision is seen in our outstanding results

for full-time mature students, where students in the age categories of **21 to 30 years and 31 years and over are performing at MAB for completion**, respectively, and ILWB for continuation.

78% of our students come from demographic groups significantly underrepresented in HE. This includes a higher proportion of students who report a disability (23.7% for FT UGs compared with 16.8% sector average). We celebrate the fact that we see no notable difference in the very high rates of continuation between these students and those who do not report a disability. Through our inclusive approach to teaching and learning, students with a disability have outstanding completion (MAB) outcomes. Since 2012, we have worked hard to support our neurodiverse students. We know that students identifying on the Autistic Spectrum may face additional barriers in their studies, particularly around transition times.^{xvii} Our Early Start Programme runs the week before Welcome Week so that students can familiarise themselves with campus and move into their accommodation at a quieter time. Students meet other staff and students, have their key questions answered, and attend workshops including study skills and IT sessions.

3.1.3 Evidence-based approaches to continuation and completion

The nature of our students' backgrounds mean they often experience personal, family, and/or financial challenges alongside their academic studies. Engage, our learner-analytics tool (described above, in Academic Support), is enabling a cohesive approach and a culture of early intervention. Where engagement indicators demonstrate a risk of disengagement, students are invited to supportive academic tutorials. In cases where informal interventions are insufficient, more formal 'case consultation' meetings between students and staff provide a structure for us to address individual factors impacting engagement. This year we are introducing personalised 'push' notifications of engagement data for students and a call-centre to reach out to disengaged students, while undertaking further analysis of patterns of engagement to identify opportunities for additional support throughout the academic year.

We regularly review internal data dashboards on student engagement, continuation, and completion. This has driven improvement in continuation, such as **Biomedical Science**

Creative Writing and **Occupational Therapy**

Programme- and subject-level data analytics are provided, and action plans identified where necessary. For example:

- The Business Management (statistical confidence tending towards below benchmark and 3.3pp below indicator) action plan includes additional assessment support, a 'formative feedback week,' writing retreats, and peer-assessment exercises that we anticipate will improve continuation through enhancing students' independent learning skills and engagement with assessment and feedback.^{xix}
- Demonstrating the strength of our academic support for students across the years,

We continue to enhance our approach to induction and transition to embed induction as a whole student/course lifecycle learning process where confidence-building and check-in activities are integrated at key points.

- We recognise MBB continuation for our small number of Asian and Mixed Ethnicity students. In a survey, undertaken in May 2021 in preparation for our Race Equality Charter submission,

several students indicated that their sense of belonging was affected by a perceived lack of ethnic diversity in York. Our detailed Race Equality Charter implementation plan identifies a variety of measures to increase BAME staff and student representation, and diversify our curricula, which will contribute to a stronger sense of belonging and thus boost retention for students from minoritised ethnic groups. Our WP team provide dedicated support for BAME students, and continuation for students has improved 2.1pp between 2020/21 and 2021/22 for first year FT UG.

- Our LTSE Strategy Action Plan for 2022/23 is implementing good practice in peer mentoring, and support for groups at risk of disadvantage or disengagement (e.g., [local commuting students](#)) and further enhances our induction materials. We anticipate this work will improve continuation, including in MBB areas where cohort numbers make it more difficult to track the impact of interventions

We can see the impact of this continuous improvement approach on our completion rates, which are regularly MAB. We attribute this to our expanded and data-informed academic tutoring, and our robust and well-supported assessment resit process. Each programme has a bespoke resit support package, including individual tutorials, writing labs, module-specific support videos, and - for students with a summer resit - a dedicated Student Success Week in August.

3.1.4 Financial support for continuation and completion

The impact of our financial support of students extends across continuation and completion metrics. Until 2020 we operated an 'Aspire' bursary scheme, providing targeted funds (c. £500) to support all students from low-income families to purchase course materials. However, our internal analysis demonstrated that the programme had limited impact on continuation. In 2020, this scheme was replaced with the [YSJ Scholars programme](#), providing more targeted financial support. An award of £800 per annum is provided every year to BAME students, those with a low residual family income, estranged students under 25, care leavers under 25, or students who receive an offer with four points or more on our contextual offer scheme.

To alleviate the cost of living in 2022/23, we are working in partnership with our SU to support students, including **investing over £750k in expanded student support**, a YSJ larder, substantial catering subsidies, frozen accommodation charges, additional help with course-related costs, and the permanent abolition of resit fees. Students have welcomed this thoughtful and transformative range of support measures to mitigate the risks hardship presents to academic success, continuation, and completion.

3.1.5 Intersectional experience

We recognise the complexity of intersectional experience and welcome insights from the new ABCS metric. While we are ILWB for most individual constituent characteristics underpinning ABCS, we note the dissonance between a disappointing MBB continuation for ABCS1 students () and the completion rate of 100% MAB for this group. We can see that, if students continue with us, their chances of completing are excellent. We seek to improve ABCS1 continuation further. We observe that, among students who are care leavers, 40% of full-time continuing and 57% of full-time completing students nationally are in ABCS1. We anticipate that our scholarships and specialist support will positively impact this indicator. Although not recorded within ABCS definitions, we extend these scholarships and support to estranged students. Over the reporting period, the number of students with care leaver or estranged status has increased (from 33 in 2017/18 to 94 in 2021/22). YSJ is a signatory to the [Standalone Pledge](#) (a kitemark for institutions who actively recognise the needs of and provide dedicated support for estranged students) and we deliver additional assistance through bursaries and scholarships, and flexible and barrier-free accommodation, alongside dedicated support from our WP and Careers and Outreach teams. We provide CPD to raise awareness and upskill staff in their support of these vulnerable groups. Our Global Opportunities team have improved our offer to incentivise our care leaver and estranged students to participate in study abroad in greater numbers (a

Study Abroad Scholarship is ringfenced for them), and we are seeing an encouraging uptake of Turing Scheme Funding. Our Careers Progression Programme for care leavers and estranged students has seen a significant increase of the target groups' engagement with our Careers team

To establish a trajectory of further improvement in continuation and completion, the LTSE action plan (1.4) identifies further enhancements in academic support, continuous improvement in our wellbeing provision, and a whole-university approach to mental health including an evaluation of the form and timing of assessment.

3.2 Progression

Our work in supporting student progression is already of very high quality, as shown by our **ILWB indicators** overall. We want to go further. Our 2026 Strategy refresh (July 2021) affirms a commitment to 'embedded employability that supports positive graduate outcomes with professional accreditation as appropriate.' Our LTSE strategy includes commitments to 'education for the future' (LTSE 3), whereby we equip students with the skills and knowledge to thrive in an increasingly uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world, and to 'education for the wider world' (LTSE 4), through which we empower students to succeed in their chosen path and to address the global challenges facing society.

3.2.1 Employability with a Purpose – social justice and community

From our foundation in 1841, our social-justice mission has driven our ambition for students to progress to a graduate-level job or further study. Our very first graduates became teachers in under-resourced local schools. We continue to see our graduates as an important part of our civic contribution. We are a net importer of people and skills to Yorkshire: c. 50% of students come from Yorkshire but c. 70% choose to stay here after graduating.^{xxi} Our graduates play a crucial role in regional economic recovery and health. Every year, secondary and primary YSJ-trained school teachers start work in schools across the region and country, helping to provide the best possible start for future generations. In 2021, we introduced adult and mental health nursing programmes, supporting healthcare providers in York, Yorkshire, and beyond. Each year, we train allied health professionals, including physios, occupational therapists, and paramedics.

YSJ is an active partner in spearheading regional change, improving employer understanding of graduate talent, increasing student understanding of the local labour market, and tailoring effective careers and enterprise support.

3.2.2 Employability embedded across curricula

Since 2019, we have embedded the opportunity for a placement, study abroad, or integrated work experience in every UG programme. We have enacted a range of strategic developments, which we predict will generate further improvement in our Graduate Outcomes (GO). Our LTSE strategy (4.3) includes a commitment to develop curricula in dialogue with external partners and to ensure accreditation by professional, statutory, or regulatory bodies (PSRBs) wherever possible. In recent years, we have increased the proportion of our courses accredited by PSRBs. The last graduating cohort featured in published GO results began their courses in 2017/18 when 45 courses (28% of our UG portfolio) were PRSB accredited. Through enhancement activity and strategic development of our portfolio, by 2021/22, we had a **total of 98 accredited courses (34% of our UG portfolio)**. This affirms our commitment to developing a talented workforce for socially impactful sectors: for example, **19.3% of our graduates are employed in Education, and 13.5% in Health and Social Care.**

3.2.3 Employer-engaged curriculum design (LTSE 4.2)

We help students secure positive graduate outcomes by linking subject areas to industry and civic advisory panels, so that what students learn is informed by contexts of application, industry, and knowledge exchange. For example, YBS shapes its portfolio development with input from the York and North Yorkshire Chambers Leadership Group, York Digital Initiative Skills, and the City of York Council Skills Board.

We have also worked with industry experts from the Yorkshire Universities Regional Development Group and the York and North Yorkshire Growth Hub to ensure that employers are not just providers of placement and project opportunities, but are engaged with programme design and delivery:

- Biosciences (MAB) engage an Employer Liaison Group as they validate and refresh programmes
- Allied Health and Biosciences (MAB) support better transition to professional outcomes through investment in spaces, equipment, and staff/courses focusing on authentic simulation to prepare students for regional work placements.

Further enhancements in the 2022/23 LTSE action plan include the creation of an ambitious experiential work-related learning framework, involving engagement with employers through placements, live projects, and authentic learning activities across every level of every course. In this way we are embedding skills and attributes valued by employers for all students. We anticipate this will yield further improvements in GO data.

To ensure all students can acquire and articulate the skills and attributes in demand by employers, a refreshed set of YSJ Graduate Attributes was co-developed in 2021/22 with key stakeholders including students, alumni, employers, and staff, and drawing on [research conducted by academic staff](#) at YSJ, which has influenced policy at a national level ([HEPI](#)). This work reveals that employability depends on a complex interaction of the labour market, graduates' social capital, and the capabilities, skills and personal attributes of each individual student. Our Graduate Attributes emphasise enterprise and professionalism as enablers of career success. It focuses on ethical decision making, emotional intelligence, and global perspective, to align with our social-justice mission.

'Enterprise' is a new Graduate Attribute, which entails skills in collaboration and creativity (as per our signature pedagogy), that are valued by all employers. Many of our students wish to start their own business or, social enterprise, or pursue a portfolio career. To support this, our Grad2Director and Grad2Freelancer schemes launched in 2017, with 55% of participants starting or intending to start a business, and 45% of these students provided with funding, and highly valued mentoring. In 2021, we launched the YSJ Enterprise Centre, providing space, support, and specialist advice on start-ups. In 2022, we developed the 'Kickstart programme' specifically for our students to develop entrepreneurial ideas and access guidance and support on starting a business, becoming self-employed, or free-lancing. Two Kickstart funds invest in students' entrepreneurialism: the 'discover fund' provides up to £400 for a student to scope ideas, and the 'launch fund' provides £800 to students and recent graduates wanting to translate their enterprise idea into reality. The Merchant Adventurer company in York is funding a valuable prize and network support for entrepreneurship from 2023.

Our Careers team has a long-standing record of working collaboratively with academic staff to locate employability in the fabric of our programmes, engaging employers, subject-related organisations, and PSRBs in the learning-design process. Examples include:

- Computer Science (MAB), where employability is designed through liaison between career consultants, employers, and programme leads; students complete authentic assessments co-created through industry partnerships.
- In Sport (MAB), where all students complete a Skills Passport alongside endorsed courses such as Active IQ and Sports Coach UK - our Sport and Exercise programme is accredited by the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences and our Sport and Exercise Therapy programme is accredited by the Society of Sports Therapists. Our Sport and Exercise Therapy programme is accredited by the Society of Sports Therapists.

- Creative Arts and Design (MAB), in which students reflect on issues relating to social class and socio-economic background within art education and show increased understanding of career trajectory and professional capital. Here, the External Examiner commends “[t]he department’s focus on employability [which] means that there are many innovative ideas in regard to learning and teaching.”^{xxii}

The impact of ‘embedded employability’ work by academic staff in collaboration with the Careers team is evidenced by strong 2022 NSS responses to relevant questions:

- ‘As a result of my course, I believe that I have improved my career prospects’: 79.4%
- ‘Good advice is available for making career choices’: 74.2%
- ‘Good advice is available on further study opportunities’: 72.6%

3.2.4 Data-driven employability

As we continue to design employability into the curriculum, we support the expansion of employability opportunities and experiential learning with robust data. Our ‘Careers Readiness’ survey systematically collects data at the point of registration, on the total work experience of YSJ students, on social impact and ‘civic good’ projects, and we collect student reflections on the value of that experience for their future lives. Over 16% of our students reported that (during their studies) they engaged in ‘building skills through a voluntary role’ and over 70% report ‘building their skills through work.’

We use GO data to identify the strategic importance of experiential learning, noting from our 2019/20 GO Survey that **100% of students who completed YSJ-funded internships were in employment, and 93% were in highly skilled employment.**^{xxiii}

We use this data to frame strategic proposals such as our commitment to offering a placement year opportunity in every programme (2019 onwards), and our Employability Framework that requires every programme to include external, work-related experiential learning.

We have outstanding outcomes for progression in many split indicators:

- Education and Biosciences are MAB above benchmark respectively.
- Our very high-quality outcomes for students reporting a disability and IMD Q1 and Q2 students highlight our commitment to positive outcomes across the range of our students.

We acknowledge that there are some gaps in our progression split indicators, including some underperforming subject areas and lower outcomes for students from Geographies of Employment Q1 (MBB, 4pp below benchmark), those eligible for Free School Meals (MBB, 7.3pp below benchmark), and for ABCS Q1 students

As [OfS research](#) demonstrates, inequalities in geographies of opportunity are often compounded by factors such as household income.

Recognising challenges for students who experience financial hardship or are from backgrounds associated with lower social capital led us to challenge our approach to extra-curricular work opportunities. Many of our students reported that the traditional internship approach was too constraining or difficult to balance with other work or family commitments. We have therefore developed more flexible approaches, including part-time and virtual professional paid-work opportunities. According to our internship engagement data, over 76% of the students who have engaged in recent professional paid opportunities are from one or more underrepresented group(s),

Acknowledging some scope for improvement in our progression outcomes for certain subjects, we use career intelligence and predictive analytics to identify differential outcomes associated with disadvantaged student

cohorts or underperforming subject areas. In 2018, the University embedded the use of a YSJ-specific Graduate Employability Matrix (GEM) in partnership with Gradcore, a specialist graduate recruitment social enterprise. A 'GEM' score was calculated for each subject year group, which identified priority areas. In 2018/19, this led to targeted opportunities and customised interventions in the School of Humanities, which now includes six out of nine MBB subject splits in the progression dashboard. This yielded increased positive graduate outcomes for the School, rising from 48.8% of 2017/18 to 54.1% for the COVID-impacted 2019/20 graduating cohort. To achieve this, and continue improving, the School of Humanities adapted practice in individual subject areas:

- **Media and Film studies** (part of Media, Journalism and Communications, MBB 7.6pp below benchmark) created employer panels and specific technical skills development including using Adobe suite leading to a **23.9pp improvement** (34.9% for 2017/18 to 58.8% for 2019/20).
- **Theology and Religious studies improved 22pp** (from 44.8% for 2017/18 to 67% for 2019/20) by refreshing a work-related learning module to include systems of critical reflection on skills and career confidence – an improvement that is mirrored in our 2021/22 YES data, in which 85.4% of our current students reported feeling confident in their future career prospects.
- **History improved GOs, increasing 8.4pp** from 2018/19 (45.3%) to 2019/20 (53.7%) through the measures outlined above and through additional support for student placements in the second year.
- Performance for Geography (MBB, 22pp below benchmark) fluctuates due to low student numbers, showing a high of 57.1% and low (post-pandemic) of 40.9%. To further skills development and practice, we have invested £175k in a new Geosciences facility (launched 2022) to enable students to acquire laboratory skills, revalidated to incorporate Geographic Information System (GIS) skills across levels and specialisms, and included live briefs with employers. We have strengthened qualitative and quantitative data-analysis skills at Level 4, ensuring all students develop and practise skills highly valued by employers throughout their degree programme.
- English Literature and Creative Writing (tending to 4.6pp below benchmark for English Studies, but with lower statistical confidence) created innovative industry-focused postgraduate study opportunities through the creation of our new MA Publishing suite which was developed with industry agents, publishers, and award-winning authors. Early indicators (2021/22 YES survey data) suggest that our current students' confidence in their future career prospects is high, with satisfaction levels at 80.8% and 74.6%

Other MBB subject splits are being addressed through our PRE process, with bespoke enhancements including:

- **Business Management** (3.7pp below benchmark) worked with our Careers team to pilot a 'Success Lab' (2018/19) - a bespoke programme developed in partnership with graduate recruiters and industry leaders, focusing on developing students' transferable skills and expanding their networks. This contributed to a **5.3pp increase** in positive GOs to 63% for our 2019/20 graduating cohort compared with the previous year.
- In 2020/21, Psychology (5.5pp below benchmark) appointed an employability lead who engaged successful alumni in a series of careers talks for students. They are now extending this offer, increasing authentic assessment, and drawing on the impactful model of the 'Success Lab' to develop an employer engagement forum in the YSJ Communities Centre.

Overall, we can confidently evidence existing good practice, performance, and enhancement activity in relation to progression. We recognise that performance data is uneven, and we are committed to data-driven and targeted improvement where needed. As summarised by a 2021 report commissioned from Gradcore:

There has been an overall strategy refresh which places employability prominently within institutional goals. A new PVC for Learning and Teaching has also set out a clear emphasis on employability in the curriculum and embarked on the refresh of the university graduate attribute model. We experienced

strong levels of buy in from senior staff within the Schools and wider leadership towards ensuring employability at YSJ is effective and impactful. There is ... a deep commitment to social justice stressed by almost every member of staff we met, linking it to employability development and Graduate Outcomes.

This epitomises our commitment to graduate success, social justice, and civic impact via progression.

3.3 Educational Gain

Educational gain at YSJ is the collaboratively achieved change in our students' knowledge, skills, values and confidence, that occurs during their programme of study. These are changes which help to promote understanding of -and make a positive difference to - the communities in which they live, learn and work, in the pursuit of social justice.

As this working definition suggests, we approach educational gain by comparing student academic attainment at entry and exit and analysing broader measures of achievement related to career readiness, graduate confidence, and heightened societal and cultural awareness. We are producing measures of how successfully our students have acquired and articulated those attributes.

In January 2022, we convened a cross-university group of staff and students to explore different interpretations and measures of educational gain. The group tested a measurement instrument that uses existing data about academic attainment and developed a questionnaire that aimed to include our students' understandings in our definition of educational gain.

We asked two questions:

1. Can we predict our students' educational gain, based on their prior attainment in assessments at school or college (using existing data)?
2. What do our students think 'learning' is, how do they think learning happens, and how do they think it can be measured over time (using new data)?

3.3.1 Existing data relevant to Educational Gain

To address question 1, we applied the 'value-added' measure of learning gain used in the [HELGA study](#). This explores the relationship between degree outcomes and tariff point scores. Initial linear regressions of overall average module mark show that tariff point scores are a moderately reliable predictor of achievement or learning. However, for students with non-A Level qualifications included in their tariff point score, the relationship between prior attainment and degree outcomes is less clear. We concluded that, whilst the quality of students' learning at graduation is related to what they bring into the University, their prior academic achievement only accounts for part of their success.

Our findings appear consistent with the HELGA report, which found that that there is no single measure of learning gain when using existing administrative data. We concluded that, in order to explore the additional learning gain that our students achieve, we needed to ask them about their perception of 'learning,' how it happens for them, and how it might be measured. This is stage two of our project.

3.3.2 Refreshing our definition of Educational Gain

In stage two, our cross-university group of students and staff designed and trialled a small-scale survey

Results demonstrate that our students experience significant learning gain, including: increased subject knowledge; learning practical and professional skills; and improving their communication and organisational skills. 'Confidence' was mentioned more frequently than any of these dimensions of learning; 'independence' featured as frequently as 'knowledge.'

Respondents told us that learning happens through academic engagement, but also through broader university interactions and communities. Educational gain was conceptualised as positive change, though not necessarily linear or additive 'progress'. This impression aligns with leading sector studies in understanding the variables and intangibles of learning gain, even beyond academic attainment and degree outcomes.^{xxv}

We continue to work with our students to develop a range of measures. This work began with the 2022 YES and NSS, with the inclusion of a new question: 'My course has provided me with opportunities to develop understanding and appreciation of diversity and difference in society.' 77.7% of our graduating students agreed, or strongly agreed, that they had made gains in this aspect of their education.

Further to this, we are deploying a pre-graduation survey in May 2023 that asks students to reflect on how effectively they have acquired the five newly adopted Graduate Attributes. This will allow students to 'measure' their educational gain against criteria they co-produced (see Progression, above), and to find a form of critical reflection that articulates their personalised acquisition of skills, knowledge and attributes.

3.3.3 Enhancing our Measures of Educational Gain

In addition to developing richer 'student voice' data on educational gain, we have committed to building on our existing measures of co-curricular learning gain, including:

- Since 2021, we have surveyed UG perceptions of career readiness as part of Welcome/Welcome Back week. This will enrich our GOs data scope for internal longitudinal measurement.
- As part of our new Employability Framework, we will build a clear platform for students to progress from career awareness to employer liaison and engagement as they move through their programmes. A new 'Employability Passport' (LTSE 3.2) charts how students acquire our five graduate attributes, and articulate their applied and experiential learning, establishing a portable digital showcase demonstrating employer-engaged educational experience, and a currency of 'gain' recognisable to external audiences.
- Beyond statistics for positive graduate destinations, we already use our GO data to measure broader educational gain such as 'meaningfulness' of work and sense of 'wellbeing.' This provides further longitudinal evidence of the benefit of gains in knowledge, skills, and attributes as our students graduate.

In summary, we connect educational gain to our social-justice mission by enabling and going beyond gains in academic attainment. Our view of learning gain is one that captures our students' heightened readiness to engage with society in impactful, respectful, and meaningful ways.

4 How we supported our students during lockdowns and through COVID

From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, YSJ took a 'people-first' approach to supporting and guiding staff and students through the rapidly changing guidance and restrictions. This shaped every stage of our response, from the early days of immediately vacating campus and moving online, to students returning in September 2020 to a socially distanced, COVID-safe campus.

Academic principles defined early in the pandemic provided a cross-university approach to learning, teaching, and assessment. We provided an accessible, high-quality, engaging experience for all students, making sure all programme outcomes continued to be met. From FAQs and pulse surveys to consultation with SU, regular student communications captured student need, wellbeing, and mental health status. In response we expanded opportunities for individual academic tutorials, group academic tutorials, and online Q&As with subject leads. We increased hardship funding (an additional 40% in addition to the OfS funding), targeted support for care leavers and estranged students, removed resit fees, offered accommodation refunds, and invested in online mental health services for students and staff.

Whilst lockdowns were undoubtedly disruptive, feedback from our students showed that our online teaching was innovative and creative. Tutors were able to make themselves fully accessible to students using Microsoft

Teams. This is demonstrated by feedback from students who rated their ability to contact staff when they needed to at 4.4 (SVR Semester 2 2019/20), 4.29 (SVR Semester 1 2020/21), 4.33 (SVR Semester 2 2020/21) and 88.2% (YES 2021/22). Event attendance increased and enabled more international external speakers. Feedback in NSS 2022 welcomed 'lots of opportunities to learn outside of lectures, such as guest speakers coming in and work experience opportunities.' Our School LTLs and Technology Enhanced Learning team worked together to offer flexible CPD to our academic staff, building capacity, expertise, and creativity in the production of online materials. For students on programmes with a requirement to use specialist software, our IT team made this available online. Extensive consultation between our SU, Registry and Assessment teams ensured that adaptive assessments and flexibility in exceptional circumstances allowed students to demonstrate that they had met their learning outcomes and, in doing so, maintain the standard of their award.

We listened to our students throughout the pandemic, working to ensure some teaching for approved 'practical subjects' returned to campus when allowed. Flexing with each government directive as appropriate, and focused on keeping our community safe, we prioritised on-campus learning whenever possible. From March 2021, a programme of supportive learning opportunities enabled re-engagement and confidence building, allowing us to be one of very few universities to hold an in-person (socially distanced) student Art show in August 2021. The success of this principle-led approach is evident in our 2022 NSS results, with an **increase of 9pp to 80% (4.1pp above the benchmark)** compared with the previous year for agreement with q. 18: 'The **IT resources and facilities** provided have supported my learning well.'

The following is a typical comment from the free-text section of the NSS 2022:

The way the online lectures were adapted during COVID was brilliant and I feel like I still learnt as much from home as what I would at university.

Using insights from the pandemic, and student and staff feedback, we continue to seek new opportunities for delivering teaching innovatively. In direct response to student feedback, we have rolled out an extensive programme of infrastructure investment to **establish lecture recording by default** in order to help all students consolidate to their learning.

5 Conclusion

We have outlined the diverse facets of our students' outstanding and personalised experience, driven by partnership, inclusivity, and authenticity in learning, teaching, and assessment, and underpinned by our commitment to social justice. The strength of our provision across aspects of experience and outcomes is demonstrated by the fact **we have sustained excellence in NSS over the whole TEF period (as one of the top 30 universities in the country in 2022). The wide array of MAB indicators further attests to the fact that we provide an outstanding student experience and outcomes.**

We have shown that we have a coherent strategy for educational enhancement, which commands support across the University, establishing the relationship between our institutional policies, our practices, and our students' experience and outcomes. We have demonstrated how we continuously analyse and respond creatively to the challenges and affordances of our context.

We have explained how we have achieved **a very strong (planned and evaluated) upwards trajectory since 2017**. We offer additional evidence in this submission to show that the experience and achievements of our students are genuinely outstanding.

6 References

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- ^{vi} [YSJ Graduate Attributes](#)
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