

## Canterbury Christ Church University

### 1. Provider context

#### 1.1. Our Mission and Purpose

1.1.1. Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) is deeply committed to changing lives and increasing social mobility through widening participation in higher education. Our mission is to pursue excellence in education and research; inspired by our Church of England Foundation, we are passionate about transforming individuals, creating knowledge and enriching communities to build sustainable futures.

1.1.2. Our purpose and educational strategy are to provide learning opportunities inclusive of all students from diverse backgrounds, ensuring they feel a sense of belonging, are part of the CCCU community and their wellbeing is supported through a distinctive Compassionate Curriculum. These enablers underpin our students' self-efficacy and resilience to achieve excellent graduate outcomes and develop future-fit attributes. We are ranked third in the UK amongst large universities for graduates in work.<sup>1</sup> Our graduates are successful in gaining highly skilled employment and make meaningful contributions through active citizenship to meet regional and global societal challenges.

#### 1.2. Our Indicators of Excellence

1.2.1. Across the aggregated TEF four years (hereto listed as Y1, Y2, Y3, Y4) all three indicators of the Student Outcomes Measures (Continuation, Completion and Progression), are in line with sector benchmarks, evidencing excellence and a very high-quality education experience for the mix of our undergraduate students. Indicators for Student Experience Measures, including 'The Teaching on my Course', 'Assessment and Feedback', 'Learning Resources' and 'Academic Support', are also in line with sector benchmark for full-time students. There are three indicators below benchmark measures for part-time students, which are addressed in 2.1.3. Our Student Outcomes measures, Student Experience measures, and our submission demonstrate how we have delivered excellence for our undergraduate students to make a firm claim for an overall rating of Silver.

1.2.2. Student Voice is the one metric which is below benchmark as an aggregate of the four-year TEF timeframe. However, as outlined throughout our submission, new institutional initiatives delivered in partnership with our students and the Students' Union, have resulted in our highest response rate for five years in the NSS. The most recent, Y4, shows significant improvement, with a 4ppt increase in 'Student Voice' performing in line with sector benchmark as well as a 3.2ppt increase in 'Assessment and Feedback' performing 3.4ppt materially above sector benchmark. The Student Submission has been created independently by our students to ensure that their autonomous voice is retained and heard while working in partnership with us to develop our Provider Submission.

#### 1.3. Our Students

1.3.1. CCCU embraces a diverse student and staff community with just over 18,500 students in total and 1,700 staff. 79% of those students are undergraduate. Our full-time mature student population (21 and over) is 48.5% at undergraduate level, over double that of the sector average of 23.4%.

1.3.2. With 47% of our full-time undergraduates from IMDQ1 and IMDQ2, almost half our undergraduates have challenging socio-economic backgrounds coming from areas of rural coastal deprivation in the South East or areas of inner-city deprivation in London. This is significantly higher than the sector average of 32.4%. Just over 50% of our students choose to commute to

campus. Many are mature students with parental responsibilities and others decide that commuting is a more affordable option. Just under 29% of our full-time undergraduate student population are from minority ethnic backgrounds, above the sector average (26.7%) and significantly higher than the Kent and Medway population (11.4%).<sup>2</sup> The majority of our full-time undergraduates identify as female (62.3%), higher than the sector average of 55.9%, and 16.6% of all undergraduates have a known disability, in line with the sector average of 16.8%.

1.3.3. Working as partners with our students and sensitive to their rich and diverse needs, we are confident that our student experience and outcomes measures demonstrate significant features of excellence in delivering a high-quality educational experience.

## **1.4. Our Staff**

1.4.1. All academic staff at CCCU have responsibilities for learning and teaching, academic support and research. This balanced academic role ensures that our teaching is research- and industry-informed and our curriculum remains current and future-focused while confronting societal challenges. Our students are encouraged to develop as future researchers, working alongside our academic staff in their applied research.

1.4.2. REF 2021 assessed CCCU as having more than doubled its proportion of world-leading (4\*) research and quadrupled its proportion of world-leading (4\*) impact since 2014. In KEF2, CCCU was placed in the top 20% of English universities for working with the public and third sectors, and in the top 40% of universities in key areas, including local and regional regeneration, public and community engagement, continuing professional development (CPD) and graduate start-ups.<sup>3</sup>

## **1.5. Our Campuses**

1.5.1. We are a large faculty-based university delivering our student experience across multiple campus sites, with 86% students at Canterbury Campus, 11% at Medway Campus (Health and Education) and 3% at Tunbridge Wells Campus (postgraduate Psychology only).

1.5.2. Our Kent and Medway Medical School (KMMS) is an exciting collaboration with the University of Kent. Having secured national funding, KMMS is now in its third year of delivering high-quality teaching and inspiring the next generation of medical professionals. Attracting talented students from all backgrounds, KMMS is transforming the future of healthcare by providing a more diverse medical workforce.

1.5.3. We have invested over £100 million in the redevelopment of our campus with two new buildings: the Verena Holmes Building for STEM subjects and the Daphne Oram Building for the Creative Arts. Plans to relocate the Students' Union into the heart of the Canterbury campus to increase the visibility and vibrancy of the student community are underway and will be delivered by September 2023.

# **2. Student Experience**

## **2.1. Introduction**

2.1.1. As noted in section 1.2.1, our Student Experience metrics clearly demonstrate a typically very high-quality (Silver) outcome. The exception to this is the Student Voice metric, which has improved markedly following a focussed effort in the period covered by this TEF. This is explained in section 2.6, but the result is that the most recent year shows that we are now at benchmark in this area.

2.1.2. We are aware that some of the student experience metrics were disappointing concerning Academic Support and Student Voice, particularly for Black, female and mature students. As there is a larger percentage of these student groups in certain subjects, namely Education & Teaching,

Allied Health, Health & Social Care and Nursing & Midwifery (48% of the TEF student population but 59% of female students, 54% of Black students and 73% of mature students) this has led to some subject split metrics being below benchmark. We have used this as an opportunity to take targeted actions within those subjects (see sections 2.4 and 2.6), and we are using a range of mechanisms, such as our CCCU Learning and Teaching Conference and Portfolio Performance Plans to share good practice linked with specific student characteristics.

2.1.3. Finally, although there are aspects of below benchmark performance for part-time and apprenticeship students, the number involved are a small minority of our total (220 and 130 respectively) and are covered by the subject areas above (apprenticeships are primarily in Health & Social Care and Nursing & Midwifery, and two-thirds of part-time are in Education & Teaching).

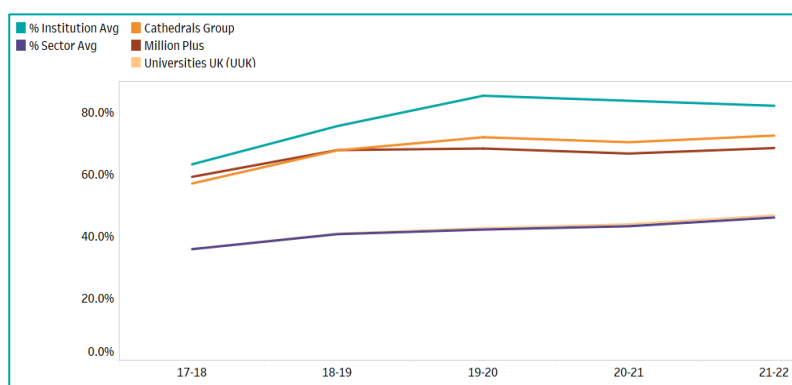
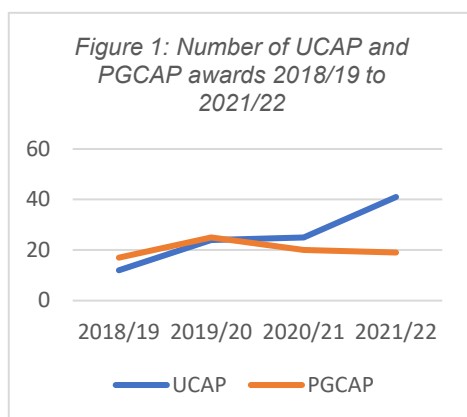
## 2.2. Teaching on My Course

2.2.1. At institutional level, our NSS metrics for teaching have remained around benchmark (including during COVID where we maintained our teaching excellence) with three subject areas indicating a consistently above benchmark performance and two subject areas below benchmark. We are committed to teaching excellence and developing our community of academic excellence and practice.

### **Commitment to Teaching Excellence**

2.2.2. In our Learning and Teaching Strategy<sup>4</sup> we commit to providing all students with an outstanding higher education experience, equipping them for success in their personal aspirations and wider contribution to society beyond graduation. The strategy provides a focal point for discussions about course design, student outcomes, staff development and our resourcing decisions.

2.2.3. Our expectation is that all staff will deliver and support high-quality learning and teaching and that this is recognised and rewarded. New academic staff are required to undertake a teaching qualification, either the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) or the University Certificate in Academic Practice (UCAP), which is open to sessional and part-time academic staff, PhD students with a teaching commitment, and professional services staff who support learning. The UCAP allows participants to acquire AFHEA with Advance HE and the PGCAP leads to FHEA. Fig 1 shows the numbers of UCAP and PGCAP awards made over the past 4 years.



*Figure 2: Percentage of Academic Staff with Fellowship<sup>1</sup>*

2.2.4. My Accredited Pathway (MAP:HE) is our accredited route for staff to gain Advance HE Fellowships (Associate, Fellow and Senior). It is open to all academic, research or professional services staff with more than three years of higher education experience. In 2020 Advance HE commended several areas of good practice within the scheme including:

- Fellowships embedded in probation and promotion pathways

- our offer of a comprehensive range of professional learning opportunities aligned to the UKPSF
- our collaboration with the Universities of Kent and Greenwich around joint fellowship activities such as mentor and assessor training, and joint writing retreats.<sup>5</sup>

2.2.5. We have a high number of staff with Advance HE Fellowships, 82.2% against a sector average of 46.1% (Fig 2). We are continuing to grow our Senior and Principal Fellows by holding school workshops and through Advance HE development sessions.

2.2.6. Our commitment to teaching excellence through teaching qualifications is having a positive impact on students and staff. The following from a fellowship claim shows the impact of the course on the participant and their students.

*"The UCAP programme of study has transformed the way I teach students. Learning outcomes are now stated at the start of each lecture and how they fit into the overall module aims. Previously, I did all my talking in the first half of the session, then practical work afterwards. Now I run lots of shorter tasks throughout the lecture to keep students engaged and encourage active learning."*

*"In [the first year] in XX's lectures (before the UCAP) there used to be a lot of talking before we spent a long time producing a piece of content. In [the next two years] (post UCAP) lectures were a more interesting mix of formal teaching and practical tasks that kept us engaged throughout."*

2.2.7. Our commitment to teaching excellence is evident in our approach to career progression and promotion. Regardless of career path, we value formal recognition of teaching experience. Within the promotion criteria, Fellowships are required for Senior Lecturer, Reader and Professor, and Senior Fellowship for Principal Lecturer.

### **Community of Academic Excellence and Practice**

2.2.8. We have a programme of events and initiatives to support and develop academic excellence, including the CCCU Learning and Teaching Conference for staff and students reflecting key themes such as Inclusive Practice, Learning Communities and Compassionate Curriculum. We have a Peer Observation and Review Scheme, University Teaching Excellence Awards and a Small Grant fund (£2000 overall) to support initiatives that enhance learning, teaching and assessment. We have a rich range of CPD with regular events and bespoke developmental activity driven by metrics and key priorities.

2.2.9. Following our success in 2016 in winning the Times Higher Award for Most Innovative Teacher of the Year, we were successful again in 2019

The judges said "demonstrated substantial impact through his innovative approach of using poetry within healthcare education."

Following the award has continued to publish and influence the approach to nursing education as illustrated in the following quote:

*"Through the use of poetry, taught me a whole new way of learning. One that pushes you out of your comfort zone. One that makes you reflect and learn about yourself as you engage with literature. One that enables you to explore ethical considerations, question, challenge and test ideas." (Level 5 Student, 2019)<sup>7</sup>*

2.2.10. In 2020 our Sustainability Team won an Advance HE Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence for placing Education for Sustainability at the "core of programme design, delivery, informal and subliminal curricula. Hundreds of staff and students each year take part in workshops

and activities which enable them to reflect on their role in society both now and in the future.”<sup>8</sup> Sustainability continues to be firmly embedded in our mission and aims with “Shaping Sustainable Futures” being at the heart of our new Strategic Vision 2030.

2.2.11. Achieving 19<sup>th</sup> place in the Whatuni survey for Lecturers and Teaching Quality, a survey driven by student opinion, is testament to our commitment to high quality learning and teaching.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Our Actions in Subjects with Metrics Below Benchmark***

2.2.12. **Allied Health.** The Y4 NSS showed an improvement for ‘teaching on my course’. The School has put in place a new leadership structure. The suite of courses has been redeveloped for 2023, in co-design with students. The majority of courses within the School are regulated by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) who commented positively on our approach to NSS outcomes in their performance review process report 2021-22.<sup>10</sup> In reference to the redevelopment of courses they agreed that we *“have processes in place to review and implement changes to the curriculums”* and that *“the education provider had implemented a good plan to address the low NSS scores”* and *“evidence shows they use NSS scores to generate improvement and plans to improve learner experience”*.

2.2.13. The award-winning ‘Bridging the Gap to Leadership’ Project started in February 2021 as a collaborative project between CCCU and the University of Brighton.<sup>11</sup> Funded by Health Education England, the project has enabled us to gain deeper insights and enhance the learning experience of Black, Asian, mixed heritage and minority ethnic students undertaking Health & Social Care placements. One placement provider said: *“really appreciating the extent to which BAME students are affected and how much we can all support and help change things within not just education but the workplace as a whole.”*<sup>12</sup>

2.2.14. **Education and Teaching.** Recent redevelopment of the Childhood and Education Sciences suite of courses has set a strong trajectory for improvement. This is yet to be reflected in the NSS, but in the UK Engagement Survey 2022, under “Interacting with staff” two out of three Education courses (Education Studies and SENI) are above benchmark and Early Childhood Studies has improved compared to the previous year on all measures but one.

2.2.15. We were successful in our Initial Teacher Education application in the first round of DfE accreditation (May 2021) to run ITE courses in England from 2024, demonstrating our knowledge and expertise regarding curricula. The following highlights the ability of the team to adapt while remaining student centred.

*“The programme team have always been open to challenge and recommendations round programme design and practice. Between Covid, DfE accreditation and the changing frameworks from Ofsted it has been a challenging time for all in ITE. The team have managed these challenges effectively and have always retained the student as their central focus.”*

## **2.3. Assessment**

2.3.1. At an institutional level, assessment continues to be an area of strong performance. The latest NSS shows a materially above benchmark performance for assessment in nine subject areas.

2.3.2. Since the previous 2017 TEF submission, we have continued to strengthen our assessment infrastructure. Our 15-day timely feedback policy is well-embedded. We have consistent marking procedures, updated in response to internal or external drivers. To support assessment literacy, consistency and fairness, all new staff involved in teaching are required to undertake our

“Assessing at the University” course, followed by our “Effective Assessment and Feedback” course. This ensures staff understand assessment policies and regulations and inclusive assessment design.

2.3.3. Our April 2021 evaluation of take-home examinations (introduced during the pandemic) found a positive impact on student wellbeing and inclusive practice and has led to their incorporation into our list of supported assessment types.

2.3.4. We continue to develop our assessment practices working in partnership with the Students’ Union. 2021 saw a focus on Academic Integrity including the introduction of a new policy, toolkit and workshop.<sup>13</sup> We have recently updated our grading criteria to reflect the OfS sector-recognised standards with an enhanced approach to spelling, punctuation, grammar and numeracy. In line with our focus on a Compassionate Curriculum, we have taken the opportunity to phrase criteria more compassionately to emphasise positively how students can improve. This has been well received by the Students’ Union who commented *“The change in language was strongly welcomed as an improvement and more supportive of students”*.<sup>14</sup>

2.3.5. Two subject areas are materially below benchmark for Assessment – Health & Social Care and Allied Health Professions. As described in section 2.2.12 (Teaching on my course), there has been significant work done in the School around leadership, course design and quality improvement (approved by the HCPC) that explains the rise in score for Y4. External Examiner feedback highlights the improvement in assessment:

*“Individual assessments are very well aligned to learning outcomes. They are interesting, innovative and enable students a degree of choice in content. They facilitate learning of themselves and enable students to make links between theory and practice”.*

## **2.4. Academic Support**

2.4.1. Overall, our performance for Academic Support is at benchmark. During Y1 the University was broadly in line with benchmark; during Y2 and Y3 the NSS scores in this area dropped to significantly below benchmark but rose back to being broadly in line with benchmark in Y4. There are, however, five subject areas which were performing below benchmark over the TEF period.

2.4.2. As an institution we are focussed on campus-based delivery valuing the benefit of face-to-face interaction in the classroom and for building a sense of community and belonging. During the pandemic, the location of support shifted alongside the pivot to online teaching, and this was keenly felt by our student population which was accustomed to a particular model of engagement.

2.4.3. We take a whole-university approach to Transition, Orientation and Induction. We provide online Welcome and Welcome Back Hubs<sup>15</sup> where students access a wide-range of support resources, complemented by on-campus activities. This approach has increased student engagement and satisfaction year-on-year and is highlighted in a UUK case study<sup>16</sup> for supporting students who started in Autumn 2021.

2.4.4. All students are assigned a Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) who prioritises meeting with the student early in their first year of study. The PAT policy and handbook apply across all courses.

### **CASE STUDY: The Student Engagement Dashboard for PATs**

2.4.5. Developing the rapport and understanding of each student's unique situation and needs was much more challenging during the pandemic. In the autumn of 2020, the Student Engagement Dashboard was designed for PATs to see their student's engagement with learning across multiple touchpoints in one accessible place. Given the pivot to online learning, there was minimal on-



campus attendance data; however, the dashboard pulled in data from the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) (online attendance), the library (physical and e-resource activity) and assessment submission. PATs and faculties were able to use this data to identify students with low engagement and have supportive conversations. For an example of the impact see section 3.2.3.

### **CASE STUDY: Learning Skills Hub**

#### **2.4.6. Academic support**

accelerated the development of a skills hub for students to access at their own pace. In September 2020 the Learning Skills Hub (LSH) was launched.<sup>17</sup> The LSH is an online space, designed to support our students' needs in study skills development, for example providing modules in critical thinking and academic skills. From December 2020 to April 2021 the LSH was the second most visited page at CCCU (Google Analytics Data) with the foundation year and level 4 modules being the most popular. Student feedback has been very positive:

*"Seeing it all laid out like this has helped me see all the steps needed to make a good essay. It's helped me see I need to plan more."* (Student feedback on the LSH module, 2021)

### **Our Actions in Subjects with Metrics Below Benchmark**

**2.4.7. Business and Management.** The team recognised that scores fell despite considerable work to support students during Covid including online PAT support and academic tools. It became clear that the students found the lack of face-to-face contact challenging as shown below in quotes from students in the NSS.

*"When there's face-to-face contact, it's easier to do work - I miss the face-to-face contact and getting direct, instant feedback and instant communication."* (NSS 2021)

**2.4.8.** In response, in October 2022 the Business School developed and implemented a Check-in Hub, a peer mentoring space for students. Its aim is to provide new starter students with a safe space and supportive environment to start studying, and in its 10 weeks of existence, peer mentors have delivered 136 hours of academic support to peers through 70 individual interventions.

**2.4.9.** The team has also enhanced academic support with additional timed communications for assessment support. This is designed to improve student engagement with formative assessment, revision and focus on "feedforward".

**2.4.10. Education and Teaching.** The context for students in Education and Teaching was one of significant disruption as it includes placement learning in other education settings alongside campus-based study (see section 2.6.33). The course team has put in place a number of actions including a more sustainable approach to Personal Academic Tutoring. This additional support has been communicated widely across all stakeholders to ensure consistency of approach focussing on integrating academic and professional learning and the individual needs of the student. There has also been a radical redevelopment of the curriculum with early indications of success evidenced by the UKES (see section 2.2.14).<sup>18</sup>

**2.4.11.** There is end-to-end individual support from induction, mirrored at each level of study, through to employment or graduate studies, where students are offered progression exit interviews at level 6. This builds on the success of this initiative in other subject areas where it has contributed to excellent NSS outcomes.

**2.4.12. Health & Social Care.** The team has put actions in place that are being implemented and evaluated this academic year. They include Student Practitioner Workshops to give students the opportunity to reflect on their identity as a student and a future professional,

working with the Team to map a “golden thread” of Learning Skills aligned with module assessments and strengthening their Personal Academic Tutoring approach.

2.4.13. With Public Health and Health Promotion, course modifications were made to the first summative assessment to ensure that students demonstrate the necessary skills for their ongoing studies. Student feedback allowed the team to consider what extra support was required to develop confidence in the classroom and with assessment. Students had opportunities to receive peer and academic formative feedback as well as group PAT sessions. The interventions have supported students in their first assessment. This strategy has been successful increasing on-time coursework submission of the first summative assessment of the year 2022-23; 87% of students submitted on-time with a further 8% submitting within five days of the deadline. This is a marked improvement on the previous year when 65% submitting on-time or within five days.<sup>19</sup>

2.4.14. **Allied Health.** As described in section 2.2.12, the School has in place a new leadership structure with a focus on improvement and scaling-up good practices for academic support. The team has also developed an implementation framework, co-designed with students, to increase consistency in the PAT role. These initiatives will be incorporated into a new suite of Allied Health courses in 2023.

### **CASE STUDY: Occupational Therapy Virtual Coffee Break**

2.4.15. The team developed a virtual coffee break session to create a sense of belonging between staff and students. Initially, in response to the pandemic, these sessions ran three times a week for an hour. During the first half, the teaching team provided a question-and-answer session, and in the second half, participants swapped strategies for home working and social distancing. As sessions evolved, the team invited occupational therapists from practice to join the sessions allowing them to gain first hand insight as to how the students were feeling:

*“the virtual coffee time has established an essential connection and support system with one another and acts as a reminder to me of the bigger community I am a part of.”<sup>20</sup>*

2.4.16. **Psychology.** Following a dip in Y2 and Y3, the most recent NSS data for Academic Support shows an improvement as a result of actions the course team has put in place, including weekly sessions with course mentors, specific assessment support with the Team and videos to explain assessment. “Shut Up and Write” are quiet supportive sessions for students to focus independently on work, run twice a week by instructors to get students writing.

2.4.17. Institutionally, by considering lessons learnt from the pandemic and with a robust focus on course performance and improvement, we are confident that our Academic Support metrics will continue to improve. In 2023 we are implementing Student Support Advisors across all schools to work alongside the PATs and be a first “port of call” for students.

## **2.5. Resources**

2.5.1. Our students are offered a rich and varied learning environment, enabling them to engage in different types of learning activities and assessments. Academic colleagues have utilised the digital environment to foster and support a sense of learning community, with many students noting an enhanced sense of connectedness with their peers and teaching staff.

2.5.2. In the Jisc Digital Experience Insights (DEI) Survey, there is a three-year upward trend in relation to both the quality of the online learning environment and the use of the online learning environment to support learning and teaching.<sup>21</sup> Alongside this, many students have commented favourably on the use of the online learning environment to support flexible, accessible, and personalised learning. In relation to the quality of online learning, we have seen a 24ppt increase in



students ranking the quality of their online learning as either good or higher (53% to 77%, over three years). This trend is mirrored by a 17ppt increase in students ranking the quality of the online learning environment itself as either good or higher (62% to 79% over three years).

2.5.3. We have developed a 40-seat Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality (AR/VR) teaching lab with 20 workstations for VR work. We also have a high-fidelity room with high spec AR/VR equipment including full body haptic suits and an experience frame to allow free movement for an immersive AR/VR experience. Students found the experience “*educational and immersive*” and “*a good insight into what futuristic technology is like*”.<sup>22</sup>

2.5.4. Over the past four years the focus for the IT department has been on enabling remote access and mobility, ensuring our students have secure access to the services they need from anywhere. The pandemic has assisted in the accelerated implementation of these with the enablement of Virtual Campus Computers, a self-service University App Store and laptop loan services.<sup>23</sup>

2.5.5. Across the sector, NSS satisfaction scores for Q19 (Library resources) decreased during the pandemic, with restricted access to physical resources and study space identified by students. Responding to student feedback, we increased the volume of and access to digital resources, and offered 1:1 online student learning tutorials. We also redeveloped the library website, launched in November 2022.<sup>24</sup> In 2020 Library and Learning Resources received the Customer Service Excellence Award, with subsequent annual monitoring visits recognising our collaborative and student-centred approach.

2.5.6. Our two new buildings, representing £100m investment in our World Heritage CCCU Canterbury Campus, have been developed to meet the needs of our evolving curriculum as well as enhance facilities for students. The 2019 Daphne Oram Building for Creative Arts includes social, performance and exhibition spaces, darkrooms and sound and recording studios.

2.5.7. The Verena Holmes STEM Building, opened in January 2021, is home to the Kent and Medway Engineering, Design, Growth and Enterprise (EDGE) Hub, alongside specialist sport science, psychology, science and medicine facilities. Facilities, co-designed with students, academics, estates colleagues, engineering specialists and medics, include a full cadaveric anatomy learning centre using pioneering Thiel embalming, a Hydra suite, engineering labs and maker space, a policing suite including a simulation custody suite and a suite of health simulation facilities including hospital wards, an operating theatre and X-ray facilities. The social spaces were developed directly in response to student feedback.<sup>25</sup> In 2021, the Estates and Facilities team were shortlisted for a Times Higher Award for Outstanding Estates Team focussed on the development of the Verena Holmes Building.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Our Actions in Subjects with Metrics Below Benchmark***

2.5.8. **Performing Arts** has seen an increase in the NSS for resources in Y4. Previous years were impacted by specific challenges. In Y1 the move to the Daphne Oram Building was delayed for Music Production and in Y2 and Y3 students were unable to access all the technical facilities due to the pandemic. Working with students and the Students' Union during Y1-Y3, alternative facilities were developed, and the students compensated. The excellent new facilities are benefitting students now and we are confident these will lead to better outcomes for all students. For all courses within this subject area, including Music Production, scores have risen from 65 to 72 in Y4.

## **2.6. Student Voice**

2.6.1. The interventions we have made mean our performance for Student Voice (Y4) now aligns with the benchmark where previously we were below benchmark for Y1-Y3. We have made a 4.2ppt improvement between 2021 and 2022.

2.6.2. The main drivers of the materially below benchmark performance for Student Voice in the early TEF period were the four subject areas of Education & Teaching, Allied Health, Health & Social Care and Nursing & Midwifery. The lessons learned and actions taken as a result are discussed in more depth in section 2.6.20-38.

2.6.3. Commitment to student engagement is a central component of the University's learning environment. We have well-embedded mechanisms to listen to and respond to students, including but not limited to:

- the course representation system
- student representation on our Academic Board governance committees
- the explicit attention paid to student feedback from a range of sources, including module evaluation, the NSS and a Student Voice Forum for each course each semester/trimester
- student panel members on course approval and review panels, wherever possible
- a Student Voice Research Panel, which helps to inform decisions made in areas such as recruitment, marketing, communications, events, courses and student support.

2.6.4. However, we recognised that our approach to Student Voice was not operating as strongly as needed. We required greater consistency in our established structures for course representation, and there was more scope for a genuine partnership approach. One of the first priorities was to meet with Students' Union leaders, with a shared aim of boosting partnership working around student representation. This built a strong partnership foundation and has already resulted in significant improvements with demonstrable impact.

2.6.5. A new, whole-institution approach to the NSS was launched in January 2022. Our view is that boosting participation in the NSS provides rich data directly from students about what matters most to them about their experience. The University-wide campaign, involving staff from every faculty and students from a range of schools and courses, was successful. At 72% participation (compared to 68% in 2021), we achieved the highest number of responses for at least five years. Overall satisfaction increased by 4ppt between 2021 and 2022. This is 6ppt behind the sector average and, thus, will continue to be a priority for us to address, but our four-point increase in one academic year gives us confidence that our current approach is in tune with student needs.

2.6.6. From summer 2022 we embedded each course's last three years of benchmarked NSS results in Course Performance Plans (CPPs). CPPs are metrics-driven action plans used to facilitate focussed course target setting, directly addressing specific institutional priorities. These priorities include NSS theme areas (including, specifically, student voice), the benchmarked OfS Continuation, Completion and Progression measures, Access and Participation Plan targets and TEF metrics.

2.6.7. Working in close partnership with the Students' Union, we have reinvigorated the approach to student representation. First, we raised the profile of course representatives by creating a series of videos shared by course leaders during their teaching sessions and on course Blackboards. The four short videos by existing reps encouraged other students to take up the role by sharing their experiences. Course reps

explained how the role allowed them to influence improvements to their course and build their communication skills.

a course rep in 2021-22, said *"...a positive thing that we've managed to achieve is we changed next year's course layout. We'd struggled with certain things, so I fed that back to the course lead and they've actually made some changes about next year's structure and layout with the year."*

2.6.8. We also created an 'in conversation' video where the Students' Union President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor spoke about the role and rewards of a student rep.<sup>27</sup> This was promoted in lectures, across social media accounts and by the SU's two Student Voice Coordinators.

2.6.9. This approach had a direct impact on the number of reps recruited for 2022-23. At 485 it is the highest number elected in the current rep system.

2.6.10. Secondly, we recognised that students needed to be better supported to take on the role of course, school or faculty representatives. The Students' Union, in partnership with the University, delivered half-day student rep training sessions. As well as providing training on the roles from both a Union and a University perspective, it was an important networking opportunity for fellow reps.

2.6.11. Thirdly, the role of student rep needed to be clearer and more meaningfully rewarded. Changing the name of the twice-termly 'student-staff liaison meetings' to 'student voice forums' from 2022-23, as suggested by the Students' Union, gives a clearer idea that these are student-driven meetings. From 2022 to support their further study and employment, every rep will receive an open reference from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor recognising student reps' contribution and skills they have developed. The University and Students' Union jointly refreshed the course rep role descriptor, providing a clearer remit for the role and supporting reps to build their experience into their CVs.

2.6.12. The successful trajectory of the changes made so far is backed up by the Students' Union's own pulse survey data – for the question 'the course rep system is effective', satisfaction has increased by 14ppt to 57% in 2022.<sup>28</sup>

2.6.13. None of this progress would have been possible without the student voice strongly embedded in University decision-making and without partnership working with the Students' Union.

### **CASE STUDY: Covid-19 Response**

2.6.14. Students' Union membership of the Covid-19 response group led to the introduction of two important student support mechanisms. First, we adopted additional academic support measures, including a time-limited No-Detriment policy, to ensure that students' academic outcomes were not

negatively impacted by the pandemic. This was a direct result of Students' Union campaigning. Secondly, we simplified the hardship fund application process which resulted in awarding an additional 169% of hardship funding (£1.3 million).

*'I am truly grateful for the non-repayable grant. This allows me to focus on my studies and additional educational opportunities. Thank you for your support.'* (Feedback from a student in receipt of hardship funding,

### **CASE STUDY: NSS Feedback on Digital Resources**

2.6.15. From 2022 we have acted to improve the visibility of closing the feedback loop with the 'we've heard you' campaign. In Semester 1 of 2022-23 we have focussed the 'we've heard you' campaign on University-level initiatives. In Semester 2 we will be rolling out the next stage of the campaign at faculty level.



2.6.16. Qualitative data from the NSS in 2021 and 2022 included a range of critical comments about our VLE, Blackboard, such as *"Blackboard can be hard to navigate, especially when different tutors put resources in different places, which can take up valuable time to find"*. Drawing on the student feedback, we have

launched an improved Blackboard template and rolled out Blackboard Ultra. The Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) team worked closely with students to test the new technology before roll-out. The initial design of the template and the system was influenced by students' feedback. During the development stage, a group of students was involved in designing the front page, the order of the pages and the launch page. This engagement was led by the Students' Union and Student Communications team.

*"...if the university wants to do anything new, like changing Blackboard or anything like that, they'll ask the student reps to trial it first. When I was a rep, when I did it for my undergrad, I was on the panel to bring Padlet into the university. I'm proud that's still being used years later".*  
Biomolecular Science Student, )<sup>29</sup>

### **CASE STUDY: Academic Content**

2.6.17. In 2021, in a student voice forum, BSc (Hons) Occupational Therapy students fed back that they wanted more practical skills to prepare them for placement. As a result, a new 'facilitating occupational change' session was designed to support students with their assessment and therapeutic communication skills. The session was co-facilitated and designed with an expert through experience, and a simulation actor was employed to role-play home visit scenarios.

2.6.18. Students had the opportunity to practice their home visit in a safe and supportive simulation environment. The home visit was watched through a live feed in a nearby room by the rest of the cohort. Students were able to work collaboratively to improve their skills, while also providing specific advice and feedback to their peers carrying out the visit. The session was followed by a debrief with our expert. Students learnt new communication strategies, risk assessment skills, service-user perspective and reported that they felt more confident conducting initial interviews and home visits.



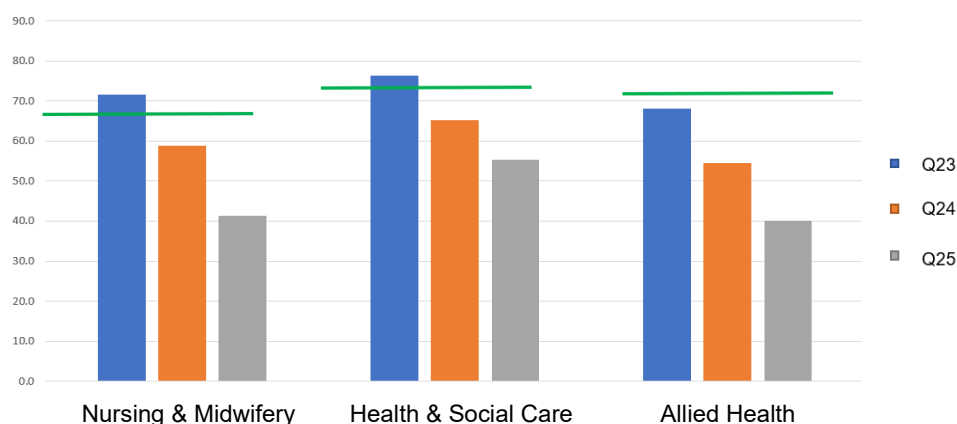


Figure 6: Student Voice individual NSS questions by subject area for 2022

2.6.26. The results for Q23 (opportunities to feedback) is not materially different to benchmark for these three subject areas. Conversely, the results are materially below for Q24 (valuing opinions) and Q25 (acting on feedback). The combination suggests the students are content they have opportunities to feedback but that requested changes aren't made.

2.6.27. Secondly, feedback from students (through Student Voice feedback sessions run by the Students' Union and through feedback to course teams) shows that placement issues have been a major concern. Changed placement structures on nursing courses, wards being shorter of staff than normal due to Covid absences, and the initial lack of information about placement changes were the critical feedback themes. Students felt that the University was not changing student placement locations when issues arose or giving onsite support in the manner that had happened pre-pandemic. However, this was because of government and local NHS Trust policies that were in operation due to the exceptional nature of the public health emergency. It is also noticeable that Child Nursing (which had a more stable placement situation through Covid) had 2022 results well above the CAH3 subject benchmark despite otherwise being run in the same manner as the Adult and Mental Health Nursing courses, which had more extensive placement issues during the pandemic.

2.6.28. Thirdly, there was a high volume of policy and regulatory change as bodies such as the NMC, HCPC and regional NHS Trusts acted quickly to respond to the pandemic. Mindful of student wellbeing, we chose to avoid overloading students at this difficult time and only communicate when there was a change of information directly impacting them. We now recognise this was perceived by students to be unhelpful and in future would provide weekly updates via the student communications team to ensure the students remained connected and informed about the external environment.

2.6.29. Furthermore, our students were on placements in NHS Trusts which had a much worse Covid experience than the national average being the epicentre of the Kent (delta) variant.<sup>30</sup> There were concurrently issues in the local trusts including the Independent Investigation into East Kent Maternity Services.<sup>31</sup> This report showed our midwifery placement provider had significant failings in its leadership and the care they provided to mothers and babies. While the university assured the quality of the learning environment, the difficulties in the Trust have impacted on students' satisfaction.

#### East Kent hospitals have most coronavirus deaths in England

More people have died of coronavirus at hospitals in East Kent than anywhere else in the country. Over the last seven days, 21 people have sadly lost their life to COVID-19. Two Kent MPs have described the figures as heartbreaking and there are now fears another wave could be disastrous for the area.

06:05

Figure 7: News report from KentOnline

2.6.30. The pandemic situation in Kent and our own communication policy at this time were the main influencing factors. This can be seen by looking at the BSc (Hons) Public Health and Health Promotion course. The course uses the same structures as our Allied Health courses, but it is not a pre-registration course with placements. For this course, Student Voice overall has not been materially different to benchmark throughout the TEF period and the result for Q25 (acting on feedback) was 11ppt above the subject average in 2022.

2.6.31. We believe, and current students have supported this view through the Students' Union organised Student Voice focus groups, that placement issues, due both to our communication decisions and the necessity for students to undertake placements in particularly challenging contexts explains the low scores for Q24 and Q25 in this area. While these factors and the local context explain the lower scores for these two questions, we have also learnt useful lessons concerning communications with students on placements, and these are already leading to improvements in the student experience.

2.6.32. These courses have been undertaking a range of additional and targeted activities to improve Student Voice for all, under the general heading "Your Voice Is Heard", including:

- working with Health Education England Reducing Pre-registration Attrition and Improving Retention (HEE RePAIR) Fellows to collect student feedback through listening events
- publishing newsletters to highlight changes made in response to student feedback
- cohort based Padlets to allow students to directly feed in more timely comments rather than only using the established student rep system
- inclusion of Student Engagement areas in course and module Blackboards to highlight changes made in response to student feedback.

2.6.33. **Education and Teaching.** For this area, the Y1 cohort had a Student Voice score in line with benchmark at 74%. However, for the three subsequent cohorts, this dropped steadily to 58.9% as the impact of the pandemic on schools became more pronounced. This was reflected in both Education and Teacher Training.

2.6.34. For Education, the pandemic caused NHS Trusts, who traditionally provided a large proportion of the placements on academic education courses (such as the BA Special Education Needs and Inclusion) to withdraw placements for three years, meaning that these cohorts had delayed or cancelled optional placement opportunities. Although these opportunities were always optional, this was one major cause of the student dissatisfaction. In addition, a large proportion (22%) of the Education subject area students have disabilities, particularly autism, and course tutors have recognised that these students found the sudden shift to online teaching especially challenging. With the return of full face-to-face teaching and resumption of traditional placement opportunities, these students report more positively on being listened to, as evidenced by the recent Student Voice focus group run by the Students' Union (*"Reps felt that if they had been like that for all three years they would be in a much better place right now"*). Some of the courses in this area have returned to pre-pandemic levels of Student Voice and are above benchmark for the 2022 results.

2.6.35. For Teacher Training, one course (Primary Education with QTS) has recovered close to the CAH3 subject benchmark (62% vs 66%) but the difference is much greater in Primary Education with Foundation Year and Primary Education with Mathematics Specialism, which are still far below benchmark. Due to external decisions from the DfE (changes to bursary availability and ITE requirements around foundation years), we decided to close these courses. Students being aware



of this situation provides some explanation as to why these specialist routes have not returned to form in line with the generic Primary Education course.

2.6.36. Courses in this subject area have also made a change above and beyond the University changes highlighted in section 2.6.3, with a renewed focus on mid and end of module evaluations with actions agreed with all students immediately in student feedback sessions. For the first modules in autumn 2022, Primary Education student engagement with mid-module evaluation has been 83%.

2.6.37. Institutionally, although four of the metrics are at benchmark, we recognised prior to the TEF data publication that Student Voice was an area we wished to improve. We have shown the work that we have done around Student Voice has already led to improvements such that the most recent year is at benchmark. We have also shown why we are producing high quality outcomes for teaching and learning, assessment and feedback, academic support and resources including investments in new areas.

2.6.38. We have also indicated across these metrics that the few subject areas that have underperformed over this period are undergoing improvement processes. We have identified and analysed external factors that led to some of the below benchmark performance.

### **3. Student Outcomes**

#### **3.1. Introduction**

3.1.1. Our data show that, for full-time students, we perform at benchmark on all three metrics for Student Outcomes and that, for part-time students (roughly 15% of the CCCU TEF population), we are materially above benchmark on all three. This performance is also evident across most of the split indicators, and we believe that this clearly meets the 'typically very high quality' requirement for a Silver TEF rating.

3.1.2. However, we recognise that, for some split indicators, our performance on Student Outcomes metrics is less consistent and we have been working hard to ensure better outcomes for all student groups. From 2020-21 we realigned our quality assurance approach, moving from annualised review to continuous improvement. Boards of Studies and Course Performance Plans have been introduced better to support teams to make impactful improvements to courses based on real-time data and student feedback. In 2022 we established a University Portfolio Performance Committee to oversee the work of continuous course improvement and take real-time supportive action to address issues, including if a course is not performing at benchmark.

3.1.3. The rest of this section looks at each of the three Student Outcomes metrics in turn and explores some of the progress being made to improve the consistency of outcomes.

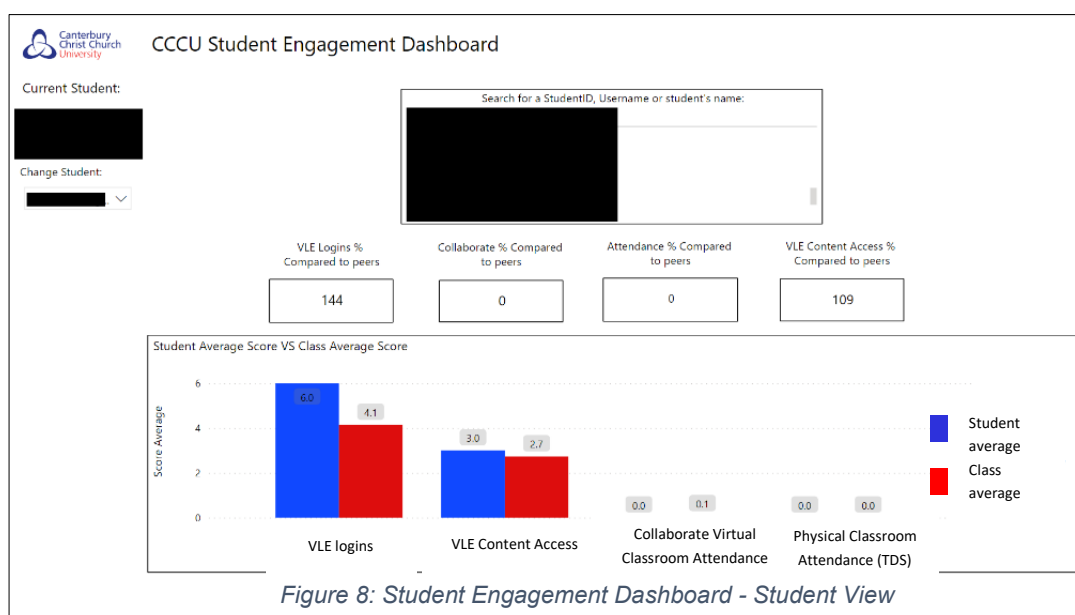
#### **3.2. Continuation**

3.2.1. Overall, CCCU's continuation rates are not materially different to the benchmark for full-time students, and they are above benchmark for part-time students, reflecting the overall high-quality of teaching, learning engagement and academic support at the University. Nevertheless, our ambition is to continuously improve student outcomes, and we have invested significant time and resources to further improve retention and achievement. This has resulted in an increase in continuation rates for full-time students, from 87.3% in Y1 to 90.4% in Y4.

3.2.2. In 2019 we set up a retention and withdrawals task force to co-ordinate and enhance retention initiatives across the University within a research-informed retention and success framework.<sup>32</sup> Initiatives have included practical improvements to business processes (e.g., ensuring that 1:1 conversations with students shape the interruptions process), capacity-building

activities (such as recruiting and developing staff to support and monitor 'at risk' students) and development of a new transition, orientation and induction system for students returning to study after interruptions, to help to rebuild a sense of peer group support and improve learning engagement.

3.2.3. The Student Engagement Dashboard (section 2.4.5) has been a key enabler for much of this work (Figure 8). The dashboard is built on three of the four pillars in our retention strategy: attendance data, both classroom and virtual; use of the VLE and library resources; and online coursework submission (through Turnitin). The fourth pillar is Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) interactions. The dashboard has two user views for staff: a course summary and individual student view. The student view, developed after feedback from tutors, has been particularly useful in providing a focus for supportive conversations directly with students, signposting help where appropriate and preventing issues from snowballing and leading to withdrawals.



3.2.4. Feedback from staff has been extremely positive: *"I am using this all the time - it is invaluable already. It has speeded up the process of checking students so we can respond more accurately and efficiently"* and the dashboard is widely used in support of Course Performance Plans in many areas of the University. As a result of use of the Dashboard by PATs and administrators an increased number of students have re-engaged with their studies.<sup>33</sup>

### **Our Actions in Subjects with Metrics Below Benchmark**

3.2.5. **Law.** The academic team delivering many of our Law courses experienced a period of high staff turnover coinciding with the pandemic. This left some students feeling distanced both from the course delivery team and the content. In response, the team recruited two new academic tutors to support learning engagement, reviewed the curriculum introducing new materials and strengthened links with the profession, including the introduction of new guest speakers. Co-development of the curriculum with students led to new sections on litigants 'in-person support' and on mediation and arbitration. The annual continuation rate for full-time first degrees in the law subject area increased from 79% in Y3 to 90% in Y4, returning to its pre-Covid position of performance at benchmark or above.

3.2.6. **Politics.** The Politics team also experienced significant staff turnover during the Covid pandemic and have subsequently put in place additional support for students, including weekly drop-ins, additional tutee meetings, additional academic support with assessment, and scheduling

five minutes for Q&A at the end of every teaching session. Continuation rates are now on an upward trajectory (increasing from 74% in Y3 to 81% in Y4).

**3.2.7. English Studies.** The English Studies subject area, which includes degrees in English Literature, English Language and Communication, and Creative and Professional Writing, is also highlighted as having below benchmark performance in the metrics. However, this is the result of poor performance in just one year (79% continuation rate in Y2) and continuation rates have been at benchmark since (87% in Y3 and 90% in Y4).

**3.2.8. Biosciences.** Like the Law team, staff in the Biosciences subject area are seeking to articulate and demonstrate the 'industry' relevance of their course as an aid to student retention. The suite of courses has sought and received external accreditation from the Royal Society of Biology, meeting part of the academic and experience requirement for membership and Chartered Biologist (CBiol) status. The team has also developed a 'skills passport', a record of practical laboratory skills to accompany student degrees, with the expectation that attending sessions to complete the necessary competencies will encourage engagement. The recent changes and efforts to support students have been recognised by recent External Examiners: *"I commend the teaching teams on the extremely high levels of support they provide to their students and the bespoke element of help"*.

### **3.3. Completion**

3.3.1. Much of our work on retention and achievement is focused on a student's journey throughout their time at CCCU; therefore, many of the initiatives to support continuation outlined in the previous sections are equally valid when considering our completion measures. Our overall performance for full-time students is at benchmark and, for part-time students, materially above benchmark, again reflecting the high quality of our teaching and student support.

3.3.2. To support our continued focus on student outcomes and success over the last two years, we have developed 'Student Insights', a new visual reporting tool based on Microsoft Power BI. Student Insights consists of a series of visual, strategic, interactive dashboards underpinned by our new student record database and available to all academic staff. Course teams are enabled to consider data from the entire student journey from application to final awards and to benchmark performance both internally and externally. Consideration of these data reports has been a key feature of discussions and review at Boards of Studies meetings in each academic school.

3.3.3. This data has highlighted, however, that CCCU's overall completion rates for full-time students dipped from 85.2% in Y3 to 83.7% in Y4, materially below benchmark for the first time. The following considers some of the areas we have focussed on for ongoing improvement in completion outcomes.

**3.3.4. Foundation Years.** As a widening participation university, we have invested in courses with foundation years to provide valuable opportunities for 'non-typical' students to participate in higher education, with the number of students on foundation years roughly doubling in Y4. Most students on courses with foundation years go on to achieve both excellent educational and employment outcomes. Nevertheless, on average, these entry routes do have lower retention and achievement rates across the sector. The expansion of courses with foundation years at CCCU was therefore a contributing factor to the dip in our continuation rates in Y4.

3.3.5. The split indicator completion rates for CCCU courses with foundation years (66.5% compared with a benchmark of 71.3%) highlights that there were also a few areas for improvement with CCCU's initial provision in this area. A foundation year review group informed the development of the Student Engagement Dashboard, the development of Padlet resources to

support students as they progress through semesters, and the review and redesign of curriculum. This work is ongoing to drive further improvements in foundation year outcomes.

3.3.6. The growth of foundation year provision and associated issues are also significant factors in some of the subject area patterns highlighted by the TEF data dashboard. Completion rates for most courses *without* foundation years within both the Biosciences and English Studies subject areas are at or above benchmark even though overall average completion rates are below. For example, the average completion rate for Biosciences is 7% below benchmark, but much higher for bioscience degrees without integrated foundation years over the same period, e.g., 93.8% for BSc (Hons) Ecology and Conservation and 87.5% for BSc (Hons) Environmental Biology (compared to the subject benchmark at 83.3%).

3.3.7. The TEF data dashboard also highlights that non-UK domiciled students have, on average, below benchmark completion rates at CCCU. However, of the students in this category are on the international foundation course, which not only introduces students to higher education but also aims to develop the language skills of students who speak English as a second language.

3.3.8. **Health Subjects.** Although high, completion rates in the Nursing & Midwifery subject area at CCCU are below benchmark (87% compared with 90%).

One of the main issues the team has identified is the difficulty some students experience when returning from interruptions. Interruptions to study on our nursing courses can be for a wide variety of reasons that reflect the nature of the student body and the intensive and demanding nature of the training.

3.3.9. The Nursing & Midwifery teaching team has therefore been central to the transition, orientation, and induction system for returning students. They have designed a subject specific induction package that includes peer group tours, introductions to simulation suites and the development of subject-based peer networks and chat groups. Course directors also develop sustainable plans for returning students using a shared template which supports collaboration between the student, their PAT, the Practice Learning Unit (PLU) team, faculty administrators and subject cohort leaders, identifying clearly who will support the student and their responsibilities.

3.3.10. While it is too early to have seen an impact on completion rates, continuation rates for Nursing & Midwifery have increased over the last two years (and are now above sector benchmark, 94.3% in Y4); the team expects this to feed through to future completion rates.

3.3.11. **Black and Minority Ethnic Students.** Completion rates are also below benchmark for students from some minority ethnic groups, and significantly so for full-time Black students (78.5%) and full-time students from mixed or other minority ethnic backgrounds (80.7% and 73% respectively compared with 87.4% for white students). Completion rates for CCCU's part-time students from all backgrounds are at or above benchmark.

3.3.12. In recognition of the need for change across our full-time courses, the University developed a 'Closing our Gap' framework in 2019 and appointed a strategic lead for this work. An initial detailed analytical report highlighted the challenge and helped to dispel some commonly held misconceptions about inequality. Working collaboratively with our students, we have developed work strands in three key areas: culture, curriculum, and community. Culture related work has included unconscious bias training, a new approach to Personal Academic Tutor conversations using a coaching model and gathering more qualitative evidence of CCCU Black student experiences. Curriculum developments have included strengthening the transition, orientation, and induction approaches for our feeder colleges, adopting 'health check' tools for inclusivity in

curriculum design, embedding 'decolonising the curriculum' in the training for new and existing academic staff, and piloting anonymous marking. Community related work has included the development of online resources for staff, external stakeholders such as the NHS, schools, colleges and professional bodies, and enhanced support for students from minority ethnic backgrounds throughout their student journey (e.g. specific peer mentoring support).

### 3.4. Progression

3.4.1. Overall, our progression outcomes indicator for full-time students (graduate level employment and further study) is in line with benchmark and has been so each year for the last three years. For part-time students we are materially above benchmark. This pattern is consistent across many of the split indicators in the TEF data.

3.4.2. Since the last TEF submission, the employment outcomes of our students in particular have improved significantly. We are now third in the UK for students in work out of larger, multi-faculty universities, and for the first time we are outperforming the sector average for this measure.<sup>34</sup> In 2019-20 75.8% of our graduates progressed to graduate-level employment, compared with 63.1% in 2016-17. Our performance has improved from 10ppt below the sector average in 2016-17 to 5ppt above in 2019-20 (Figure 9).

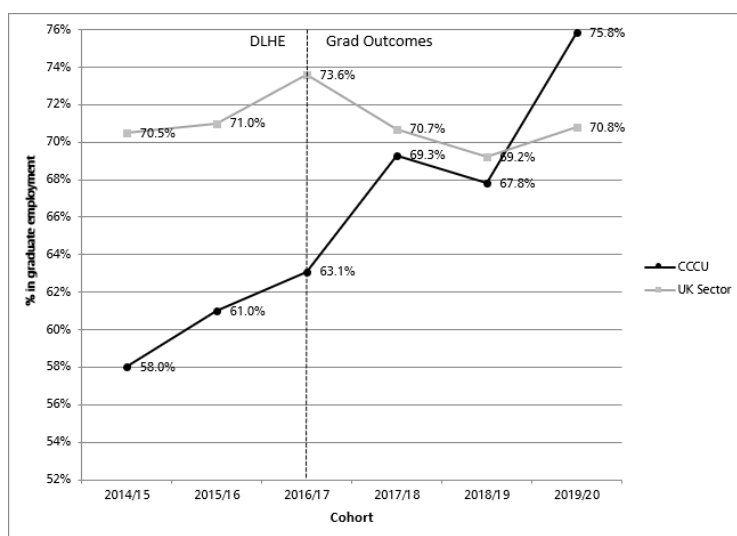


Figure 9: High-skilled employment trend – Undergraduate DLHE and Graduate Outcomes

3.4.3. This has been achieved against the challenging context of our location (being relatively isolated and surrounded on three sides by coastline), poor transport connections, and a labour market with few large employers and therefore dominated by small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). These important contextual factors, together with our ethos as a widening participation university underpinned our bid for OfS' funding under the Challenge Competition in 2018. This resulted in the *GradForce* project, which aims to help graduates with low mobility progress into graduate employment in the local SME sector in Kent and Medway.<sup>35</sup>

3.4.4. In the 2020-21 cohort of *GradForce* students, 38% of participants were from Black and minority ethnic groups (compared with 16.8% in the university as a whole); 22% were disabled (compared with 19%), and 4% were care leavers (compared with less than 1%). This recruitment was achieved through focusing on subjects with large numbers of students from a particular demographic – for example Business Studies which has a high proportion of Black students and is also below benchmark for graduate employment.

3.4.5. While the full impact of *GradForce* has only just started to feed into the Graduate Outcomes (GO) data (having only been in operation for one year at the time of the last GO survey), data collected from the 2021-22 cohort demonstrated that 91% of the students whom we were able to track, had either progressed into graduate employment or further study. In addition to the positive graduate outcomes, the qualitative feedback demonstrated the value of *GradForce* to individual students, as highlighted in the case study below.<sup>36</sup>

#### **CASE STUDY: Student Success**

3.4.6. One of our early *GradForce* students who graduated in 2021 stated that as a result of the skills and confidence gained as part of the *Get Hired!* workshops, they promoted their skills and profile proactively on LinkedIn and was offered a post

*“Without the GradForce workshops, I would never have had the confidence to put myself forward for this opportunity”. (Student participant, 2021-22)*<sup>37</sup>

#### **Embedding employability into the curriculum – Future 360 Framework**

3.4.7. The Future 360 Framework<sup>38</sup> identifies nine key areas of personal and professional development. The Careers and Enterprise team works with academics to identify, design and deliver learning that supports students’ professional development across these areas in a scaffolded approach. Future 360 recognises that our student demographic often attends university with a wide range of previous experience and though they are often ‘work ready’ lack the confidence or aspiration to take the steps required to secure graduate employment. The Framework, therefore, aims to build awareness of what skills, knowledge and experience students have to offer prospective employers and teaches them how to articulate those attributes.



Figure 10: Future 360 Framework

3.4.8. Our focus has been on surfacing current activity and identifying tailored responses to subject or industry need. Despite the pandemic forcing teaching online, we continued to develop meaningful interactions with employers through non-work-based learning interventions that not only responded to government restrictions, but also supported local businesses allowing them to access student talent. These online opportunities also helped develop students’ digital capabilities. Live briefs and similar projects provided sustainable and scalable alternatives to placements and other traditional work-related experiences.

3.4.9. Notwithstanding our overall success in improving graduate outcomes, there are a small number of subjects performing below benchmark.

#### **Our Actions in Subjects with Metrics Below Benchmark**

3.4.10. The **Business School** now has a compulsory module across the degree suite at level 5 which includes CV, cover letter and interview preparation, culminating in a joint mock assessment centre at a conference venue supported by industry professionals. This is assessed through a self-reflective portfolio, and the module is book-ended with our *Career Pulse* survey. A year in industry is available; however, the take-up has been very low, with the number of students choosing to do this reducing significantly between 2018-19 and 2019-20. In response to this, we allocated a member of staff in the Business School to support placement activity and



are recruiting a dedicated Employability Adviser in the Careers and Enterprise team. The numbers are now increasing

3.4.11. **Law** has taken steps to improve their employability, introducing co-curricular projects such as CLOCK.<sup>39</sup> This gives students the opportunity to be involved in the administration of justice through volunteering as Community Legal Companions at the local Law courts. Through the training they receive, students provide support to court service users and help individuals to consider a wider range of legal pathways available through alternative Dispute Resolution options. Further measures include recruiting a recent Law practitioner to ensure up-to-date sector links. The progression data shows that Law has been above benchmark for the last two years (62.5% in 2019-20).

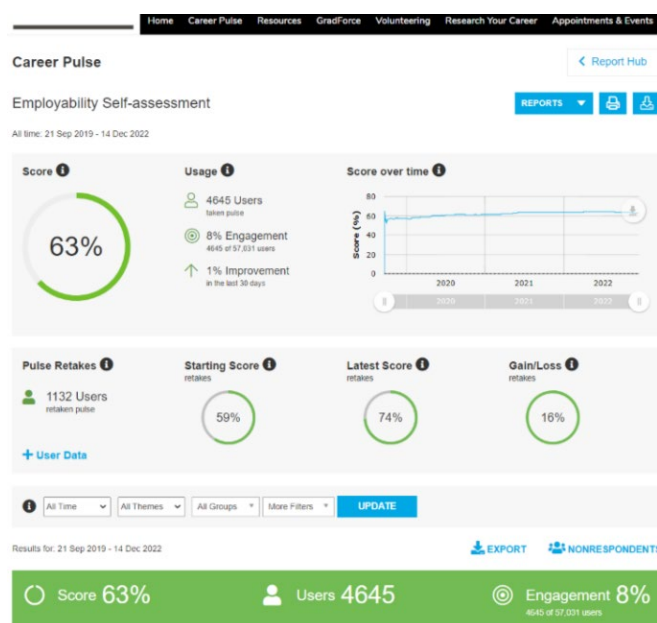
3.4.12. **Computing** introduced a year in industry option from 2020. Of the first cohort of eligible students, have secured placements in 2022-23 and we expect these numbers to increase. We run sessions for students in level 5 on finding a placement which includes CVs, cover letters and applications. At level 6, students are invited to a poster presentation event with industry professionals and alumni, with students coached before the event on how to describe their projects succinctly to potential employers and how to network. These initiatives have proven successful, with the most recent Graduate Outcomes data at 75.9% and in line with benchmark, following four years being materially below benchmark. In addition, we have secured £93,000 Royal Academy of Engineering funding to research and develop an employability toolkit to improve students graduate prospects to industry.

3.4.13. **Religious Studies** have a module at Level 5 'Applied Humanities' which provides students with a series of weekly employability workshops leading to a competitive recruitment process with feedback, in preparation for applying for micro-placement opportunities (40 hours) with local organisations. These projects have seen students from different disciplines (such as History and English Literature) collaborate to provide innovative solutions to issues facing local heritage, tourism and cultural businesses. For example, students developed an online arts festival delivered to multiple schools with the Isle of Sheppey Cultural Education Partnership.

### **Investment in technology**

3.4.14. Over the last four years, we have increased our investment in technology significantly to support employability objectives, enabling a greater number of students to access a range of tools on our online Careers and Enterprise Hub powered by Abintegro. These include: (1) CV360 - AI software that provides instant feedback on an uploaded CV using algorithms used throughout the recruitment industry; (2) Interview 360 – an AI platform which analyses responses during a videoed online interview, providing immediate feedback on eye movements, facial gestures, lighting etc.; and (3) *Career Pulse*, a self-assessment tool aligned to the nine categories of Future 360, which is linked to an online Employability Award. After completing all activities, students can download their own Employability Award certificate. *Career Pulse* also generates a range of statistical information that supports our

Figure 11: Career Pulse





institutional ability to measure impact and learning gain in relation to employability. Since the introduction of the tool in 2019, 4645 students have used it.

### **Financial Support**

3.4.15. Recognising the financial barriers faced by our students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, we set up a Career Development Fund (CDF) in 2017 to support students wanting to undertake extra-curricular work experiences. This initially focused on travel expenses and has now expanded to include financial support for a range of work-related expenses. The amount allocated to the fund has also increased, from £15,000 in 2016-17 to £40,000 in 2021-22. The figure below shows the breakdown of areas of support provided to students in 2020-21:

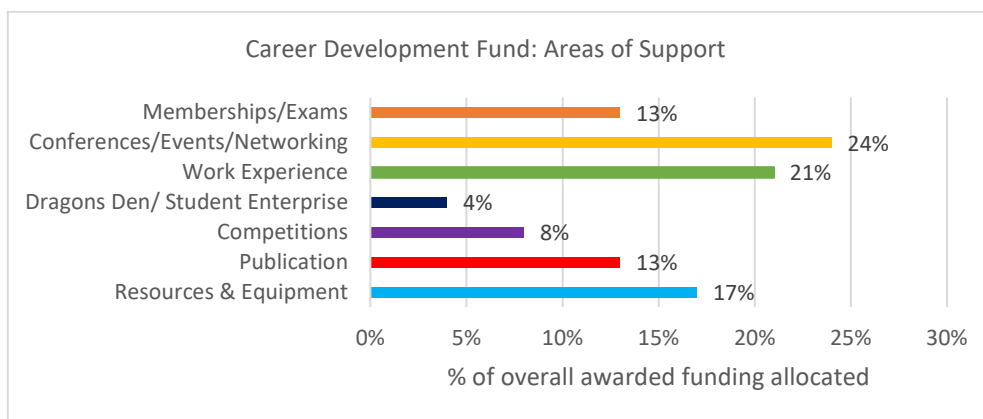


Figure 12: Career Development Fund – areas of support 2020-21

3.4.16. The CDF has successfully enabled our widening participation students to access employability and enterprise opportunities that otherwise would have been prohibitively expensive. We have also used a portion of the fund as seed money for small start-up businesses. Feedback from students we have supported has described these opportunities as transformative.

3.4.17. A BA Games Design student, regarding attendance at the UK Gaming Expo 2022, said:

*“The bursaries made a huge difference - I wouldn't have been able to attend at all without them! The event changed my entire career trajectory (in a good way!)” (Student participant, 2021-22)<sup>40</sup>*

3.4.18. In 2022 the new **Graduate Futures** department linked the careers and enterprise, fundraising, and alumni relations teams to provide greater focus and build stronger relationships between our alumni and students in support of the student experience and graduate outcomes.

3.4.19. Through the recruitment of new Employability Advisers and continued focused work within faculties on under-performing courses, we are confident that these areas will also see a marked improvement over the coming years.

### **3.5. Educational Gain**

3.5.1. Positive outcomes are achieved by our students from all backgrounds, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds or typically considered at greater risk of not achieving positive outcomes.

3.5.2. We use two key measures of educational gain to monitor the positive impact of the University's teaching:

- academic achievement, through average module marks and the change in scores between level 4 and the final level of study

- student employability, measured through the *Career Pulse* self-assessment survey and how an individual's ratings develop over time.

3.5.3. Tracking the average module marks for completing CCCU students shows a significant improvement between level 4 and level 6, as students develop their knowledge and their skills in critical thinking and analysis. Across the university, module mark averages increase from 41% at level 4 to 58% at L6. Similar levels of educational gain are demonstrated by both young and mature students, male and female, students from low participation neighbourhoods, students with disabilities and students from minority ethnic backgrounds.

3.5.4. The *Career Pulse* tool also shows a clear improvement in employability skills and learning for students using the careers and enterprise online hub. As we noted in section 3.4.7, the self-assessment tool is aligned to the nine discrete areas of personal and professional development in the Future 360 framework and over 1,100 students have taken the *Career Pulse* survey before and after engaging with the employability materials. Most students (82%) report a clear improvement in their employability skills and attributes, and a similar pattern of improvement is evident for students with different age, gender, disability, domicile and ethnicity characteristics.

3.5.5. We also use the UK Engagement Survey (UKES) to monitor learner gain, including the top-level thematic scores for critical thinking, interacting with staff, and reflecting and connecting. These UKES scores give a strong indicator that our students are developing into engaged independent learners. All non-final year undergraduates are invited to participate in UKES and the results show that for three of the last four years (Y1, Y2, Y4) our students have scored at or above the sector average in terms of overall engagement and each of the core learning engagement theme areas. Furthermore, the results show that CCCU students at level 5 report a significant increase in their engagement and positive learning behaviours. The overall engagement score dipped slightly below the sector average during the pandemic but has since recovered.

## 4. Conclusion

4.1. We believe that the metrics give a clear indication that we are providing an excellent student experience in line with a Silver TEF rating. We are maintaining and improving our strong assessment metrics, which are 3.4ppt above benchmark in Y4 and our outstanding student progression is evidenced through our current ranking as third in the UK for graduates in work.

4.2. We recognised areas below benchmark that required improvement and have taken action to improve these metrics. For example, with a focus on Student Voice we have improved our NSS response rate and achieved our highest number of student reps on record, with the impact of these actions now demonstrated by alignment with the benchmark and a 4.2ppt improvement between 2021 and 2022. We are confident that through our student partnership working, we are providing an excellent experience for our students and successful outcomes in their future careers.

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