

## 1. Provider Context

- 1.1. Staffordshire University is a teaching-intensive and research-inspired University with a focus on an academic experience, which delivers excellence in work integrated learning, digital innovation and entrepreneurial skills and behaviours. Our expertise in these areas enables us to deliver a dynamic, enriching and future-focused academic experience, which equips all our learners with the opportunities to make significant contributions to society and the economy. These are the areas that support the development of educational gains, articulated in our academic strategy, to meet the needs and expectations of our students and our wider communities, and in turn supporting an inclusive regional economic growth strategy.
- 1.2. We are a successful, confident and ambitious modern University, which has a foundational purpose of providing higher and applied learning opportunities relevant to our region and beyond. We support the transformation of our learners, our people and the local communities within which we live, work and engage. We are proud that our excellence in applied teaching and learning can be traced back to 1914, when we were founded as the Central School of Science and Technology, with a mission to support regional industries and the needs of society.
- 1.3. The centrality of that mission continues to inform our Strategic Plan<sup>1</sup>, articulated as *Catalyst for Change* (Figure 1). This commitment as a university is shaped by and shapes our 'place': creating transformational opportunities and outcomes through our academic expertise. This commitment continues to be the dynamic, which drives our ambition for continued learning and teaching excellence. Our Strategic Plan has been data informed and developed consultatively with stakeholders across the university shaped by discussion, dialogue and inputs through institution-wide roadshows with staff and students.
- 1.4. The Strategic Plan focuses on four interdependent priorities: Next Generation Education. Next Generation Experience, Next Generation Engagement, Next Generation Environment.
- 1.5. Our focus on *next generation* allows us to deliver a student academic experience and educational gains, which reflect our context and the skills needed for the future workforce. Digital innovation is a feature of our pedagogical approaches and it furthers our ability to personalise learning through digital coaching and tailored academic interventions. Our embedded employability, work-integrated learning, enterprise skills and business engagement equip all our learners with the knowledge, skills, behaviours and experience to meet directly the needs of the emerging digital and green economy for sustainable, inclusive growth.
- 1.6. Our academic strategy<sup>2</sup> is the framework through which we deliver our Strategic Plan to drive the academic benefits and outcomes of our students' experience. Our academic strategy is delivered through a consistent educational philosophy across all our courses. It was developed to:
  - meet our commitments for access and participation to increase equality of opportunity.
  - develop a modern portfolio which meets the needs of the regional and national economy and global civil society.



Figure 1. Staffordshire University Strategic Plan.

- ensure the success of students from diverse backgrounds.
  - facilitate an inclusive research culture and extend our research base (including enterprise, innovation, and impact) through internationally renowned research centres.
  - embed research inspired education at the heart of our curriculum.
  - co-create pioneering approaches to pedagogy and digital infrastructure with our students, trainees and apprentices.
  - recruit, develop and retain high quality staff, reflecting the region we serve.
  - develop sector leading approaches for pedagogic evaluation to raise the standards of evidence for what works.
- 1.7. Our Board of Governors performs an active role in overseeing our academic performance and quality management activities. We have fifteen (15) governors in post including the Vice-Chancellor. Two governor roles are held by the Students' Union as well as two three-year appointments to governor roles drawn from our academic and professional services staff respectively. This approach ensures that both the student and academic voice is proportionally much stronger than other institutions. The Board of Governors receives a comprehensive annual report on academic quality and standards and minutes from our Academic Board (which meets four times a year).
- 1.8. Fifteen new key performance indicators (KPIs) were developed in 2022 as part of the new Strategic Plan and were matched with six strategic priorities, with annual milestones, to support the achievement of the KPIs. Milestone performance is reviewed annually and the relevance of specific KPIs is integrated into all reports for our boards and committees through a standardised report coversheet. The Strategy and Performance Committee (SPC), which draws its membership from the Board of Governors and has members of the Executive in attendance, was formed in 2017 to provide increased oversight of our organisational and academic performance. Seven out of our 15 KPIs relate directly to areas contained in the Teaching Excellence Framework, including: work experience and employability; student success; student satisfaction; student retention; teacher accreditation; teaching quality; and extra-curricular activities.
- 1.9. Our expertise in digital transformation builds from our innovations, which have sector impact:
- the 1<sup>st</sup> UK university to move its administrative IT infrastructure to the cloud.
  - the 1<sup>st</sup> UK university to introduce an AI powered digital coach for students.
  - one of the first universities to offer a BSc in Cloud Computing in the UK with an approved Amazon Web Services based curriculum which, in 2020, won the Amazon Web Services Educate Challenge Cup.
- 1.10. We continue to digitally innovate, driving the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning as part of our step-change to a personalised and hybrid flexible (hyflex) learning experience for our students, both through our teaching pedagogies as well as using education data science to support students to succeed.
- 1.11. We perform materially above benchmark for the majority of the indicators as evidenced by the Office for Students (OfS) Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) dashboard. We were awarded Gold in the previous TEF exercise, and we have further strengthened our culture of excellence for learning and teaching over the last four years, investing in pedagogically designed estate, pedagogic research and evaluation, our data insights and strategic planning.
- 1.12. Since our previous submission we have been nominated for a significant number of awards that evidence our successful and continued commitment to our students' academic and broader experience as well as their outcomes. In 2020, we were shortlisted for the Times Higher Education (THE) University of the Year Award. Further recent awards include:
- Edufuturists University of the Year in 2021.

- ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in best UK universities category at the StudentCrowd University Awards 2022.
- Nurse Education Provider of the Year (Post-Reg) at Student Nursing Times Awards 2022.
- Games Development 'Best Education Initiative' at TIGA industry awards 2022.
- 'Best Educational Institution' at TIGA Games Industry awards 2020.
- Best 'Not for Profit' Project at the digital technology leaders award 2019.
- Levelling Up University awards: digital support (2021) and widening access to savings and credit (2022).
- winner "of Innovation in Teaching and Learning" at the Education Estates Awards 2020.

## 2. Size and Shape

2.1. The University delivers qualifications at all levels of Higher Education, and in the academic year 2021/22, over 22,500 students were taught directly by Staffordshire University or by one of our collaborative academic partners within the UK. Figure 2 shows our size and shape by study mode and year over the past four academic years. We are increasing the number of students who study with us for an undergraduate qualification and progress to our postgraduate courses. Our undergraduate to postgraduate conversion grew 25% between 2018/19 and 2021/22.

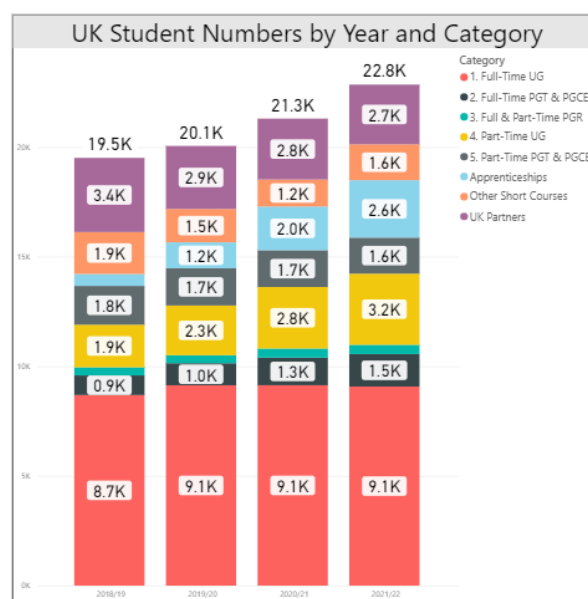


Figure 2. Size and shape by study mode and year.

2.3. We have a high proportion of students with characteristics distinct from sector trends:

- 40.7% of our full-time and apprenticeship undergraduate new entrant population are mature students<sup>2</sup>.
- 28% of our full time and apprenticeship undergraduate new entrant population are from IMD quintile 1, significantly above the sector new entrant average of 21%<sup>3</sup>.
- 45% of our full time and apprenticeship undergraduate new entrant population are from low participation areas (Polar 4 Q1 & Q2), nearly double the sector average of 28%<sup>2</sup>.
- over 63% of our full-time undergraduate students commute to campus<sup>3</sup>. The University was recognised in a HEPI Report as a case study of good practice on the innovative and individualised approach the University takes to supporting our commuting students' experience<sup>4</sup>.

2.4. We deliver an excellent learning and teaching experience for our demographic mix of students. These learner needs are at the heart of our curriculum and assessment design and inform our broad pedagogic approach (see **Student Experience** and **Outcomes** sections below).

2.5. Staffordshire University delivers undergraduate and postgraduate provision across three key campuses: Stoke-on-Trent Campus, Centre for Health Innovation (CHI) in Stafford and Staffordshire University London (SUL).

- 2.6. We have provision through a shared site in Lichfield as well as a shared health-specific site in Shrewsbury which will consolidate in 2023 to our Stafford campus. Each of our key campuses has a strategic fit with our mission and ambitions for continued innovation and excellence in the learning experience.
- 2.7. Our Stoke-on-Trent campus is where a significant proportion of our academic, research and enterprise activities take place. Our Stoke-on-Trent campus benefits from The Catalyst, our pedagogically informed building, the Hatchery (a zone to support start-ups), the Innovation Enterprise Zone and our high-quality gaming and production studios. Approximately 14,000 students studied at our Stoke-on-Trent campus in 2021/22.
- 2.8. CHI in Stafford is the primary campus for our Nursing and Allied Health provision. It provides our core Simulation-Based Education (SBE) facilities to support future workforce development in allied health disciplines. This campus provides full time and part time undergraduate courses and has grown to approximately 2,250 students in 2021/22 (up 17% since 2018/19), with much of this growth in full time undergraduate study, which has grown 40% since 2018/19.
- 2.9. In 2019 we opened the SUL campus in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, and further extended the facilities in 2022 with an additional £5 million investment in student learning equipment and technologies. This campus provides a range of digital, computing and games subject areas with learning and teaching aligned to regional skills needs. The campus has benefited from multimillion-pound investment since 2019/20 providing state of the art, industry-standard facilities for all students enrolled on degree programmes. We discuss these important estate developments as part of our **Learning Environment** discussion.
- 2.10. We have a broad portfolio of subject areas across our three academic schools (Table 1) and two institutes which support the foundational economy (including small businesses, SMEs and engineering as well as public services) and develop talent for the creative and digital economies, creating work-ready graduates who gain significant applied and industry-engaged experience throughout their programmes of study.

<b>School of Digital, Technologies and Arts</b>
Departments of Art and Design, Computing, Media, Performance and Communication, Engineering, Esports and Games Development
<b>School of Justice, Security and Sustainability</b>
Departments of Business and Management, Institute of Policing, Law, Society, Crime and Environment
<b>School of Health, Science and Wellbeing</b>
Departments of Biological Sciences, Midwifery and Allied Health Professions, Nursing, Psychology, Social Work and Wellbeing, Sport and Exercise
<b>Institute of Education</b>
Teacher Training and Education Studies
<b>Staffordshire University London (Digital Institute)</b>
Computing, Games and Esports courses

Table 1. Our Schools and Departments.

- 2.11. As well as over 20,000<sup>4</sup> students taught across our campuses in 2021/22, the University works with 22 Collaborative Academic Partnerships in the UK (with 2700 students in 2021/22, which accounted for 9% of our total student population), and 10 Collaborative academic partnerships overseas (7500 students in 2021/22, which accounted for 25% of our total student population). These include Further Education providers, private and independent training providers and other Higher Education Institutions. Collaborative partnership arrangements are in

place across a range of levels including foundation degrees, undergraduate degrees, top up years, postgraduate provision and more recently the new Higher Technical Qualifications. The University continues its strategic collaborative partnership with the Ministry of Defence enabling learners to enhance both their military career and re-training after discharge or retirement, enabling these learners to transfer their skills from their military career into other sectors. Our collaborative academic partnerships are an essential part of our delivery and commitment to supporting learning opportunities and teaching excellence in our local context.

- 2.12. The university's commitment to work-ready graduates with excellent skills and experience to allow them to gain employment in their chosen field, is evidenced by the range of industry-led qualifications we offer. The University was the 5th largest university provider of Higher Apprenticeships in 2021/22, with 940 new entrants in 2021/22, taking the University total apprenticeship population to 2600. We work in partnership with several UK police forces as well as a range of significant regional, national and global employers and anticipate that our apprenticeship provision will continue to grow both in terms of the number of employers engaged with and the standards offered. The University expects to have recruited 6500 apprentices between September 2017 and July 2026, across a range of standards. Our apprenticeship provision was inspected by Ofsted in 2022 and was awarded Good (2) for Overall effectiveness, as well as Good (2) for all other measures, with the inspection report stating,

*Leaders work closely with employers and other stakeholders to shape the curriculum, designing curriculum which tackles national shortages...Teachers use their extensive vocational experience to place learning for apprentices into context....As a result, apprentices are able to link theory to practice well*

- 2.13. We deliver a portfolio of flexible professional training and short courses, providing additional access and progression pathways into higher education for all. We are leaders in the development and provision of micro credentials (MCs) for the sector, which has resulted in a research collaboration with the Lifelong Education Commission<sup>5</sup> and funding from the European Social Fund for our Staffordshire E-skills and Entrepreneurship Gateway to deliver MCs. Our current suite of MCs reflects regional economic priorities with a focus on digital skills, web and data analytics and carbon net zero business development and are free at the point of access to Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire based students, graduates and small and medium enterprises (SMEs). This offer has been overwhelmingly positively received by learners and our business partners, with over 700 students enrolled in this provision<sup>6</sup>.

### 3. A civic university

- 3.1. Our campus locations and the diverse communities we serve, affirm our commitment to widening access to underserved groups in higher education, providing excellent learning and teaching, facilitating economic and social mobility for our graduates and improving the quality of life for those in our wider communities. A range of good practice case studies from Staffordshire University, including our Innovation Enterprise Zone and our Raising Voices, Changing Lives, Ending Poverty community project were featured in the recent MillionPlus publication *Staying Local to Go Far*<sup>7</sup>.
- 3.2. Our communities face fundamental socio-economic challenges affecting life opportunities, with almost one third (32.1%) of Stoke-on-Trent postcodes featuring within the top 10% most deprived neighbourhoods nationally according to the government's 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) release, which also shows that our communities have the 12th highest level of

deprivation overall in the IMD. The average healthy life expectancy for residents in Stoke-on-Trent is 56.7 years compared to a national average of 63.4 years. Gross weekly wages for our Stoke-on-Trent communities are 15% below national average and the gross value added per capita is 21.7% below national average. Only 15% of Stoke and 24% of Staffordshire residents possess Level 4 qualifications or above, well below the 27% national average. This civic context is articulated in our *Catalyst for Change* Strategic Plan and thus finds expression in our curricula, our research expertise and knowledge exchange as well as in our broader partnership working, student placement and volunteering opportunities. These engagements support workforce skills and training, sharing of best practice and collective problem-solving, for example with NHS Trusts on community mental health strategies, schools on learning support and teacher training and improving community digital skills capability for supporting education and labour market access.

- 3.3. In 2019 the University signed the UPP Civic University Agreement<sup>8</sup> affirming our commitment to improve the regional economy and enhance the quality of life in our local communities. In 2022 the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF2) acknowledged our programmes for knowledge exchange – our continuing professional development and graduate start-ups scheme, and research and consultancy with the public and third sector organisations, were considered ‘very high engagement’<sup>9</sup>.
- 3.4. Our role as a civic institution means we significantly invest in widening access to higher education in our communities through our schools and colleges liaison activity, our sponsoring of the Staffordshire Universities Academy Trust, established in 2014, now a high performing 20 strong Multi-Academy National Trust, and our additional investments in our Forest School and Woodlands site (see **Student Experience** section).
- 3.5. The University recruited over 6100 students at all levels in 2021/22 from Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire, accounting for over 30% of our overall on-campus student body. We are the largest provider of full time first degrees for students from Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire (by postcode district), with approximately 35% of all Stoke-on-Trent residents and approximately 14% of all Staffordshire residents who go onto university (to complete a first degree) in 2020/21, attending Staffordshire University<sup>10</sup>.
- 3.6. This civic mission is also reflected in our Staffordshire University: London campus sited at Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, where the portfolio and learning space design fit the industry needs of East London and the inclusive economic growth plan of the London Legacy Development Corporation. In 2021/22, 32% of students came from East or South London Boroughs, with 52% of students being recruited from London boroughs.

## 4. Our culture of academic excellence

- 4.1. To deliver learning and teaching excellence through our Strategic Plan we have continued to enhance and invest in:
  - our institutional governance through greater alignment of our professional service and academic review processes with our strategic priorities.
  - our organisational structures through, for example, creation of new directorates to support academic quality and staff development, enhanced leadership of our enterprise and business engagement portfolio and additional senior School-based academic roles of Associate Dean Students, Associate Dean Recruitment in 2016 and Associate Dean for Business Engagement in 2021.



- our staff culture through the #StaffMakesStaffs programme, launched in February 2020, which engages all areas of the University in proactive cultural development to support delivery of the strategic plan.
  - our innovative academic strategy, which has gained external recognition through a 2021/22 Quality Assurance Agency collaborative project *A toolkit for implementing Phenomenon-Based Learning*<sup>11</sup> and keynote address on our 2030 strategic thinking at Kingston University's learning festival in June 2022.
  - transforming many of our physical and digital resources (see **Student Experience** and **Outcomes** sections below).
- 4.2. Together our strategic intent, our role as a civic institution, our culture of excellence and our institutional profile inform the design and delivery of our learning and teaching excellence, which is meaningful to our context and provides excellent and innovative experiences for our learners to help to propel them towards successful academic and employment outcomes.
- 4.3. In addition to our institutional submission, our Students' Union will also provide their own student submission. We worked collaboratively on our submissions. Two representatives from the Students' Union were part of our TEF submission working group where we were able to discuss approaches and possible features of learning and teaching excellence. The Students' Union also provided updates on their TEF submission progress through the University and Students' Union liaison committee, chaired by the PVC Academic.

## 5. Student Experience

- 5.1. We have a diverse undergraduate student body, and each student is at a different academic, social and emotional starting point when they enrol. We use our resources strategically to develop and implement an academic strategy that delivers a tailored approach for all students to succeed. This section outlines how we deliver on the student experience to meet our strategic intent. We first discuss our performance in relation to the TEF dashboard indicators. We then go on to discuss how we deliver an excellent experience in the following subsections: academic experience and assessment and resources, support and student engagement.
- 5.2. Our students are active participants in the National Student Survey (NSS) and our response rate remains above sector average. For the 2022 NSS our response rate was 77.6% which was 10 percentage points higher than the sector average (67%). We consistently provide an excellent student experience which is evidenced by the following NSS rankings:
- top 20 nationally for student satisfaction for teaching quality (2018 & 2019 & 2020).
  - top 10 nationally for student satisfaction for assessment and feedback (2017 & 2018 & 2019).
  - top 15 nationally for student Satisfaction for assessment and feedback (2022).
- 5.3. Our TEF student experience indicators were informed by the following sample over four years across three study modes:

Overall sample	Full Time (%)	Part time (%)	Apprenticeship (%)
8,380	7100 (85%)	940 (11%)	340 (4%)

Table 2. TEF student experience indicators by overall sample count and study mode.

- 5.4. Full time study is our primary mode of delivery and accounts for 85% of our total student experience indicator sample.
- 5.5. The OfS TEF data dashboard indicates that overall, for our primary study mode, **Staffordshire University, and our partners, provide a student experience that sits materially above the OfS benchmark for four out of five student experience measures with the fifth indicator**

**(learning resources) performing in line with our benchmark value.** An analysis of split indicators further demonstrates our achievements for all students with materially above benchmark performances (80% or higher data distribution above benchmark) for all student group split indicators for *teaching on my course*, *assessment and feedback*, *academic support* and *student voice*. In addition, our three largest subject areas of Computing (n=1130), Creative Arts and Design (n=1110) and Nursing and Midwifery (n=840) perform materially above benchmark for the four student experience indicators listed above. These subject areas largely performed in line with our *learning resources* benchmark across split indicators.

- 5.6. We have a relatively small part time (11%) and apprenticeship (4%) provision compared to our full-time study provision. For part-time study there is increased statistical uncertainty in performance, however, we sit in line with the *teaching* and *student voice* benchmark on all 29 reportable split indicators, 25 reportable split indicators in *assessment and feedback* and 26 reportable *academic support* split indicators. Overall, our part-time mode performs materially below benchmark in *learning resources*. Our largest course areas particularly Nursing and Allied Health, Computing, Games Development and Art and Design were significantly impacted by the lockdown. Students were no longer able to access specialist technical equipment because of government guidance. We supported students to mitigate the impact of lockdown on access to learning resources by pivoting quickly to hyperflex learning delivery, enhancing our digital information resources, developing a long-term laptop loan scheme for students facing digital poverty, subsidising internet access and transitioning back to campus as quickly as possible in line with government guidance. We continue to enhance learning resources, particularly for part time students, by providing 24/7 access to more buildings across our campuses so that students can access the equipment they need at a time that is right for them.
- 5.7. In addition to university wide interventions, we have internal quality assurance processes to enhance the student experience on a tailored basis and we support courses to improve either through an expedited action planning or course monitoring process. Our approach to subject areas and course improvement will be discussed further in the **Student Outcomes** section.
- 5.8. Evidence from professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRB) and external examiners demonstrate our learning and teaching excellence. Fifteen percent (15%, n=132) of our courses are accredited or recognised by PSRBs and as part of the accreditation process, we have been commended for our approaches to the student experience through panel assessments. A thematic analysis of panel assessment documentation from 2019/20 to 2021/22 (n=14) found that our provision was praised for our:
  - commitment of staff to the student experience;
  - approach to course design and
  - strong partnership ties to industry and community<sup>12</sup>.
- 5.9. The academic year 2021/22 external examiner annual reporting (n=168) also evidences our excellent approach to learning and teaching, with high levels of satisfaction reported:
  - 98% of examiners report that the academic standards set for modules and awards are appropriate for their specified level.
  - 97% of examiners report satisfaction with the methods of learning and teaching<sup>13</sup>.
- 5.10. In the exceptional instances, where issues were noted, swift course level actions are taken, overseen by our institutional quality assurance committee, which reports to our Academic Board.



## 6. Academic experience and assessment

- 6.1. We integrate theory, practice and employability as part of our Connected Curriculum Continuum (C3), which is part of our Academic Strategy. This framework is thoroughly embedded within all our courses to support academic attainment and the development of work ready graduates. C3 ensures all students are exposed to innovative and evidence-based pedagogies which enable them to:
- develop life-wide learning skills;
  - engage in research and enquiry;
  - understand people, place and society contexts;
  - master digital capability and
  - enhance career readiness.
- 6.2. The three signature pedagogic pillars of C3 are: phenomenon-based learning; simulation based education and career focused employability development.
- 6.3. Phenomenon based learning (PhBL) uses real world challenges as a starting point for learning. Our PhBL approach is derived from global challenges articulated in the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). All students benefit from this type of pedagogy both through our taught curriculum and our enrichment programmes. Our pedagogy-informed building, The Catalyst, which opened in January 2022 accelerates the implementation of PhBL (see **Learning Resources** section).
- 6.4. In May 2022, after the delivery of the first term, we surveyed approximately 150 modules that had at least one session timetabled in The Catalyst, to better understand the impact of PhBL on learning and module satisfaction. We found that seventy percent (70%, n=376) of students reported that their module used a challenge, project or a problem to be solved as part of their learning. Those students who experienced a challenge had higher average satisfaction with their module (91.2%) than the average overall module satisfaction (79.8%)<sup>14</sup> which suggests success with the ongoing implementation of PhBL within modules.
- 6.5. We ensure that students' learning is assessed through authentic assessments such as 'live briefs' developed through our PhBL approach. We have established relationships with employers who support us with this approach while benefitting from the skills and talent of our students (see **Employability Development** section). Our students are exposed to authentic assessment that facilitates work integrated learning and engagement with research enquiry. For example, our Forensic Science students worked on solving real world problems as part of the International Cold Case Analysis Project<sup>15</sup> and as a result, they collaborated with academics to have their experiences published in a peer reviewed journal<sup>16</sup>.
- 6.6. In addition to embedding authentic assessment, we have made additional changes to our assessment processes to enhance and standardise grading approaches. In 2019/20 we moved to a single classification grading algorithm, which sought to embed sector best practice and protect the standard of our awards. Our classification system was designed to support timely completion, provide transition support to students, which progressively intensifies to develop work ready graduates.

## 7. Simulation based education

- 7.1. We have ambitious plans to develop and embed simulation-based education within all our courses as a key part of the academic strategy. We define Simulation-Based Education (SBE) as the delivery of learning through incremental exposure to real-world experiences in simulated

scenarios and environments, where learners experience the recreation of environments and circumstances which reflect the future destinations in which they aspire to work or contribute.

- 7.2. Whilst simulation is a common learning and teaching approach in areas such as health, it is emerging as a relevant pedagogical tool across a wide variety of courses. Our SBE framework provides a structured approach to embedding simulation pedagogy into our curricula across all subject areas, providing incremental exposure to real-world practice for all students. We have developed an innovative five-stage framework, which is iterative and includes:
- theoretical underpinning such as lectures and keynotes.
  - immersive experience as facilitated skills sessions.
  - situational Simulation as facilitated simulation activities.
  - immersive Application such as briefs which include consideration of environmental contexts.
  - situated Learning within practice placement contexts.
- 7.3. Our approach to SBE has significant impact on the SBE scholarship of learning and teaching across the sector<sup>17</sup> and is accredited by International Nursing Association for Clinical and Simulation Learning (INACSL)<sup>18</sup>. We have provided professional development for faculty at five universities pursuing SBE pedagogical approaches. We have been awarded three rounds of Health Education England funding to pursue and progress SBE. We also attend and host SBE conferences which bring together leading sector voices in SBE on topics such as simulation for assessment, our five-stage approach to SBE and building a simulation centre. In the past twelve months colleagues have delivered over twenty-four externally facing presentations regarding Staffordshire's approach to and delivery of SBE.

## 8. Employability development

- 8.1. In this section we will detail the range of strategies we deploy to ensure we develop work ready graduates as part of their student journey. Our work experience guarantee ensures that all students can access work experience and placements. Employability is embedded in the C3 academic strategy and led by academics. Our employability support team has significant expertise and a robust service offer for employability skills development that is tailored to specific courses.
- 8.2. At Staffordshire University, we ensure that employability is meaningfully embedded across all our subject areas. We have two strategic key performance indicators related to employability which reflect our commitment to students and to our region:
- 75% of graduates in graduate level roles, classified in accordance with Graduate Outcomes Survey.
  - 20% graduate retention in graduate roles within Staffordshire as proportion of all graduates.
- 8.3. We provide excellent opportunities for work experience and placements. We source a variety of different placement opportunities to cater to a broad range of subject areas as well as tailored to student interests. We offer placements through our Innovation Enterprise Zone (IEZ), subject specific placement opportunities and through our Student Projects Office (SPO). Close working relationships with Unitemps are key to our success and our branch was awarded Unitemps Branch of the Year in 2021 for work to deliver high quality virtual placements for our students during the pandemic<sup>19</sup>.
- 8.4. Our Innovation Enterprise Zone (IEZ) is one of only 20 Research England sponsored enterprise zones. The IEZ is an innovation-led business incubator, which provides advanced technology and facilities to high tech small and medium enterprises (SMEs) (MillionPlus, 2022). In addition

to bringing high value knowledge intensive jobs to the area, IEZ also provides paid meaningful work experiences for our students via 12-24 week placement opportunities through the Innovation and Productivity Pathfinder programme as well as our Research and Development Innovation Labs<sup>20</sup>. Supervision and support for students are provided by technical specialists, innovation fellows and innovation advisors. Since July 2021, IEZ has provided approximately 300 tailored paid real world placement opportunities for students to collaborate with industry, working on a wide variety of real-world projects such as product development, business model audits and intelligent mobility research. We have collected 26 case studies so far from IEZ placement activity, which suggests that placement activity improves confidence, employability and industry-specific skills<sup>21</sup>. IEZ placements have also led to graduate level employment for our students. For example, Alpha Manufacturing worked to develop a new outdoor furniture range. His recommendations were implemented by the company and after completing his degree was hired by the company

- 8.5. Our academics have strong ties to industry, which enable a range of subject specific work experience opportunities for our students across all subject areas. In 2019 our Staffordshire Forensic Partnership won the National Undergraduate Employability Award for Best Collaboration between a University and Employer<sup>23</sup>. This partnership has enabled 28 joint projects in which forensic science, forensic investigation and computing students can collaborate. To date, all students engaged with the Staffordshire Forensic Partnership have completed their degree on time and 80% achieved good degrees<sup>24</sup>.
- 8.6. Students gain relevant experience working at The Staffordshire University Legal Advice Clinic (SULAC) through a credit bearing module run in the final year of the Law LLB providing supervised legal advice to the general public. From 2021/22 SULAC handled 209 cases across a range of topics including consumer contracts, employment, housing and personal injury<sup>25</sup>. In 2021/22 the overall satisfaction with the module was 86% (n=7).<sup>26</sup> Open comments suggested areas of excellence including:

*I was able to experience real life problems and apply the law sometimes in areas I was unfamiliar with. I feel it gave me a real insight into the practical side of law.*

*I found it helpful that we as students got the opportunity to interview clients and give them written advice. I never thought a module like this would be available but it is! There was sample questionnaires to follow at the beginning then you get the hang of it so you are aware of what questions to ask for different matters.*

- 8.7. Employability skills development and work integrated learning are key to C3. Our four employability principles were developed using a data-informed approach from student self-report careers planning data, collected on enrolment, to tailor the approach for Staffordshire students. These principles are:
- *start where you are*: self-reflective activities designed to understand yourself and possible professional identity.
  - *design your life*: self-reflective activities designed to assess knowledge and skill levels and plans to develop using Life Design approaches.
  - *prototyping*: students engage in professional networking, work experience and volunteering to support development.
  - *express yourself*: students learn and practice how to articulate where they are in their professional journey including the knowledge and skills they have gained.

- 8.8. Our academic schools also hold large scale employability events such as the School of Digital, Technologies and Arts employability week. In 2021, forty-six (46) events were hosted throughout the week with employers, professional bodies and other sector innovators as keynotes. Nine hundred fifty (950) students from across the school's diverse subject areas attended. Student feedback (n=45) suggested that students developed knowledge of innovative software for industry as well as presentation, teamwork and research skills as part of their participation in the week<sup>27</sup>.
- 8.9. Academic schools have dedicated support from the employability support team. The employability support team are represented on programme validation, curriculum design and continuous course monitoring panels and ensure that best practice in employability is embedded within the curriculum.
- 8.10. Our employability support team has a robust personalised service offer for students as well as timetabled whole group sessions developed with academic course teams to support employability development. Students are more engaged with employability than ever; the team has seen a 47% increase in one-to-one support demand in 2021/22 (n=2021) from 2018/19 (n=1378). Service feedback is positive:
- I now feel a lot more confident and prepared to undertake more job interviews. [Career Manager] holds fabulous Careers Advisory expertise, as a result I have secured the grad job as Graduate Outreach Support Worker at [company] and I will be ready to start my next chapter. The biggest learning curve for me throughout our appointment was, having so much to say, but no relevance of matching my answers to the job description. Thank you so much!*<sup>28</sup>
- 8.11. We have a robust graduate support offer and employer-student networking programme which we will detail in the relevant **Student Outcomes** section.

## 9. Commitment to staff and learning and teaching scholarship

- 9.1. We are a teaching intensive institution, committed to acknowledging and enabling staff contribution to the scholarship of learning and teaching. In this section we discuss opportunities for recognition, enhanced career progression pathways, bursary programme to enhance pedagogic practice and our enhanced staff development offer.
- 9.2. Our annual Celebrating Staff Success awards recognise learning and teaching excellence through bespoke award categories including outstanding contribution to learning and teaching; academic portfolio innovation; and outstanding course of the year.
- 9.3. HEA fellowship recognition is central to our programme of staff recognition, and we have a range of staff across all schools who have achieved levels of HEA Fellowship. Among those with fellowship are three National Teaching Fellows, five Principal Fellows and 105 Senior Fellows. Our rates of fellowship have improved from 61% of staff in 2019/20 to 66% in 2021/22<sup>29</sup>. This academic year our approach to fellowship has changed and has led to increased staff engagement. The new fellowship process has 95 more staff engaged this year, which if completed would lead to 77% of our academic staff obtaining fellowship status.
- 9.4. We invest in our staff to ensure a positive staff culture which acknowledges them for their work and provides an environment that encourages rich scholarship of learning and teaching, which they then apply to their teaching. We have completed a 360 cultural review as part of our #StaffMakeStaffs cultural transformation project which has had an impact on how we approach support for learning and teaching scholarship.
- 9.5. Our robust career progression pathways ensure equal consideration of professional practice and scholarship of learning and teaching. Both pathways, Teaching Research and Innovation

(TRI) and Teaching, Advanced Scholarly and Knowledge Exchange (TASKE), provide staff with the opportunity to evidence their learning and teaching impact as part of the promotion exercise. Staff can also move between both pathways as part of their career progression plans. We provide support for staff who want to complete their PhD and have approximately 7% (n=43) of our academic staff enrolled on a PhD programme and 33% (n=211) of academic staff hold doctorates<sup>30</sup>.

- 9.6. We also offer bursary support and professional development through the Staffordshire Centre of Learning and Pedagogic Practice (SCoLPP) and the Teaching Innovation and Learning Enhancement (TILE) hub. SCoLPP and TILE were launched in 2021 and 2022 respectively to strengthen our internal communities of practice related to the scholarship of learning and teaching, as well as to extend our external reputation for pedagogic and evaluation excellence. Our SCoLPP innovators programme distributes bursaries and professional development support for staff to pursue scholarship of learning and teaching. This initiative was launched in 2021 and in the first year we have awarded 14 staff with SCoLPP innovator awards. These two-year awards support the enhancement of pedagogic knowledge and practice. SCoLPP innovators develop a theory of change for their project to enable evaluation reporting which will be complete in 2023.
- 9.7. TILE was launched in 2022 and is our centre for excellence in digital pedagogies. They provide expertise to support digital pedagogy decision making, develop resources to support students enhance their digital skills and deliver staff development. TILE delivers digital activation days which currently average 45 attendees per activation event as well as external facing webinars to support staff embed digital pedagogic approaches.
- 9.8. Both TILE and SCoLPP are new centres for excellence, and we will monitor student and staff outcomes through a theory of change.
- 9.9. We provide opportunities for staff to showcase their scholarship through our hybrid Learning and Teaching Festival, which brings our partners and Staffordshire academic staff together to share practice. We have worked to increase engagement with our learning and teaching festivals and attendance is up by 25% from 102 attendees last year to 128 attendees this year<sup>31</sup>. Our festivals are an excellent way for SCoLPP innovators to share progress to date. Presentation topics include University-led Sports Academic: Developing student success, widening participation and social capital; and Playfulness in inductions and transitions: Using Playmobil.pro to stimulate conversations, laughter and community.

## 10. Resources, support and student engagement

- 10.1. We know that access to the right resources, support and engagement at the right time is a key enabler for student success. We provide our students with an excellent learning environment, and we have significantly increased the level of investment in both physical and virtual learning resources across all our campuses.
- 10.2. We are a research-inspired university that utilises the best of both theory and practice to provide an outstanding academic experience. The REF 2021 exercise judged 87% of our research impact as very considerable or outstanding and 68% of our research was judged as internationally excellent or world leading<sup>32</sup>. These results reflect our commitment to a rich research and practice learning environment for our students. We have a vibrant research culture, which can access expertise, resource and support from any of our 13 research centres.

## 11. Physical and virtual learning environment

- 11.1. We have strategically invested in the learning environment to support an excellent academic experience. This investment ensures students continue to have access to sector leading learning resources to support their academic experience. Our estate infrastructure across our campuses continues to transform in order to provide students with the best equipment, space and environment to learn. Key campus buildings are now accessible 24/7 so students, particularly part time students, are able to access resources when it best suits them. In 2022, we opened £43 million pedagogy informed Catalyst building, noted above. Teaching and learning spaces in The Catalyst were designed by pedagogical experts in the Staffordshire Centre for Learning and Pedagogical Practice (SCoLPP) to support the implementation of our academic strategy. The Catalyst has state of the art collision spaces for organic learning opportunities with zoned learning areas to suit a variety of pedagogical approaches. Our Apprenticeships and business partnership hub is also housed in The Catalyst to maximise opportunity for our students to engage with a wider range of opportunities.
- 11.2. Our £4.4 million Woodlands Day Nursery and Forest School, noted above, is the first carbon net zero building on the campus. Woodlands has already earned several awards including Construction Project of the Year in the 2022 CEF Awards and the Sustainability award at the West Midlands Insider Property Awards 2022<sup>33</sup>. Woodlands was designed to revolutionise how we approach learning and teaching practice in early years education from which Education students from 2022/23 onwards will be able to benefit.
- 11.3. Our £5.6 million simulation facilities at CHI have also strengthened our partnerships and enable knowledge transfer with organisations such as the NHS and other healthcare providers. Following a visit from North Staffordshire Combined Healthcare NHS Trust a senior member of their staff commended us on our learning environment,
- I thought you might like to see this fantastic new digital walls facility we are in the first stages of introducing in our Lawton House HQ. We are really excited and proud of it, but of course, yourself and colleagues at Staffs Uni may recognise it as a pale imitation of the fabulous spaces you have delivered in the Centre for Health Innovation. That's no accident. When we came to the CHI launch, we were already thinking of introducing something like this, and being able to experience your new facilities and benefit from conversations subsequently have been hugely beneficial to us in helping shape and develop our own approach. I just wanted to put on the record our thanks and appreciation for your people's sharing of ideas and insights to help us along the way. We look forward to many similar such conversations as we enter what promises to be a fabulously innovative 2023. True partnership in action<sup>34</sup>.*
- 11.4. Our 'digital on demand' library transformation, which began in 2020 has increased access to digital learning resources through the strategic procurement of e-books and enhanced journal access and increased the amount of collaborative study spaces on campus. The service transitioned to a supported self-service approach, which was shortlisted for a THE award in 2022<sup>35</sup>.
- 11.5. We ensured that students had the resources they needed to access learning and teaching throughout the pandemic. During lockdown we supported 576 students with long-term laptop loans<sup>36</sup>. We prepaid for 4G broadband services for students without Wi-Fi so they were able to fully participate in their learning. Our mature students with caring responsibilities needed additional resource to support them through lockdown so we also provided laptop loans to their



children or dependents if needed, so everyone could learn in their own time on their own devices. This package of support was highlighted as a best practice case study by the Purpose Coalition<sup>37</sup>.

- 11.6. We have a large (n=78) expert technical services team (as of January 2023) that make a significant contribution to the student experience. The team maintain technical standards, provide development and guidance for the use of equipment, ensure health and safety associated with equipment and enable practice-based techniques and methodologies in the curriculum. Our Technical Services team has a range of certifications and qualifications up to doctoral level and staff have now transitioned to academic roles<sup>38</sup>. This demonstrates their expertise and commitment to the academic experience.
- 11.7. Their expertise ensured we were able to pivot effectively to hybrid and hyperflex learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The team was shortlisted for a Times Higher Education Award in 2019<sup>16</sup>. We consistently receive excellent feedback about the technical services provision in the NSS open comments<sup>39</sup>. One comment from NSS 2022 reflects their excellence:

*The technical information and staff have always been great, all very helpful with everything. The University has access to top-of-the-line equipment and ensured all students attended professional training classes in using this equipment properly. As such, students had more freedom to pursue ambitious projects and will leave the University better prepared for working with similar equipment, within the Media Industry.*

- 11.8. We have developed and integrated several virtual resources and systems as part of our journey toward personalisation of learning. In 2019, Staffordshire University was the UK's first university to deploy a chatbot called Beacon, which uses artificial intelligence to support the student experience which has been recognised by the following awards:
- best not-for-profit project at the Digital Technology Leaders Awards<sup>40</sup>.
  - runner up in the digital innovation category at the Guardian University awards<sup>41</sup>.
- 11.9. Beacon, the digital coach, supports students through personalised, timely and relevant information through student interaction. Beacon is a two-way engagement channel to support strategic oversight of the student experience. It was designed to curate content based on user behaviour, support students by answering their questions, collect data from students that enhances their experience and complete tasks on behalf of users (e.g. ordering student cards). Students can also use Beacon to access their own data on attendance and engagement. Average student engagement with Beacon has increased 56% from 6,422 students in 2021 to 10,028 in 2022<sup>42</sup>.
- 11.10. The Customer Service Excellence (CX) project, started in 2020 and is due to deliver significant impact from 2023 onwards, will transform the University's ability to realise key improvements. providing students with a consistent and personalised customer service and specialist support offer throughout their student journey. It will improve our student case management approach, extend the support we offer through Beacon and generate data insights to improve the student experience. We are currently piloting CX with Student Wellbeing Services as an iterative approach to change.
- 11.11. In addition to Beacon and CX, our pivot toward the personalisation of learning has been supported by TILE, our digital pedagogy hub, which has enabled us to make these changes:
- apply consistent policy in collaboration with the Students' Union regarding the use of VLE to ensure effective module organisation and management as part of the return from lockdown.

- secure investment in digital pedagogy resources such as augmented reality equipment and learning technology to ensure our learning resources were cutting edge in the sector.
- deploy digital diagnostics for staff and students to provide a personalised skills development map using JISC discovery tools.

## 12. Academic support

- 12.1. As noted above, our diverse student body face significant barriers to educational access. Our approach to academic support ensures equity and is personalised so students can access a range of support throughout the student lifecycle. We use a three-pronged approach to ensure excellent academic support by supporting academics to provide a holistic academic mentoring approach; providing access to group and one-to-one academic skills sessions; and offering a range of peer mentoring opportunities.
- 12.2. Our academic mentoring approach provides mentors with an evidence-informed approach to support continuation and progression. Academic mentoring at Staffordshire is designed to support all students to achieve their potential as independent learners who are engaged with their courses. All students have access to an academic mentor and the support is enabled by our academic mentor dashboard, co-designed by academics and our Business Intelligence teams in 2019. It provides academic mentors with a range of information about their mentee including relevant student characteristics, enrolment information, past module performance information and referral links to employability support and student academic services. The dashboard also enables mentors to log actions taken from academic mentoring sessions.
- 12.3. This dashboard enables mentors to provide a personalised and data-informed session for their students. The dashboard also allows for academic mentors to refer students to student support services or careers and employability for more targeted support if students identify specific challenges to their success. Since the release, this has been one of the university's most used dashboards. In 2022 this dashboard was accessed over 120,000 times by academics<sup>43</sup>.
- 12.4. Our library and academic skills team supports students and course teams through library inductions, subject specific tailored research skills and understanding feedback workshops as well as opportunities to book personalised one-to-one sessions around a library or academic skill need. At each level, academic skills sessions have multiple touch points (at least three sessions per academic year) that iteratively build on prior learning. In academic year 2020/21 we reached 6,865 students with academic skills workshops and 1,932 one-to-one academic skills sessions were attended. For academic year 2021/22, 2,982 1-1 academic skills sessions were attended by 1,019 students.
- 12.5. Our peer mentoring programme was awarded the TARGETjobs National Graduate Recruitment Award in 2020<sup>44</sup>. Our peer mentoring approach provides students with personalised options that allow them to access the skills development and support they need. Our peer mentoring strands include employability and professional mentoring, academic mentoring and wellbeing mentoring. These mentoring strands provide a solid infrastructure of referral points throughout the student journey tailoring the support they receive at every stage. Students are mentored by experienced peers as they transition into university, by industry professionals as they transition into placements or graduate jobs and by their lead academic mentor through their degree. Engagement in peer mentoring has increased by 22% in the last year moving from 755 to 922 mentoring interactions in the last 12 months<sup>45</sup>.
- 12.6. Course teams also develop local subject specific peer mentoring programmes. Academics in the School of Justice, Security and Sustainability have developed and published a framework which details their approach to academic peer mentoring<sup>46</sup>. The academic peer mentoring

provides professional development for Level 5 to Level 7 students who are trained and supported to provide subject-specific mentoring. This subject-specific mentoring facilitates smoother Level 4 transition into university whilst also providing vital learning support on a core Level 4 module. Academic peer mentoring is mapped to graduate attributes to ensure holistic support. The three-year evaluation of this approach to peer mentoring found that mentors reported increased confidence and professionalism<sup>47</sup>.

### 13. Student engagement

- 13.1. The student voice is key to our quality assurance and continuous enhancement of the academic experience. Our Students' Union currently works with 257 trained course representatives across our course portfolio to ensure an excellent student experience<sup>48</sup>. Students are key stakeholders in course design and the continuous course monitoring process, which are two key processes that ensure a consistent and excellent academic experience. The student voice has real impact. As we returned from the lockdown, we analysed module evaluation feedback looking at how digital course delivery effects overall satisfaction. Students who expressed dissatisfaction with online elements of module delivery in open comments (8%, n=139) were less likely to be satisfied with their module (55%) compared to the overall satisfaction rate of (81%, n=1100) across all modules<sup>49</sup>. Whilst the actual number of dissatisfied students was low, the effect on satisfaction was profound.
- 13.2. This student voice data supported TILE to develop robust standardisation protocols and to invest in enhancements to our Virtual Learning Environment in 2022. The centrality of the student voice in digital pedagogy development means that TILE collaborates closely with the Students' Union. This work is formally managed through the University and Union Liaison Committee discussed in the student engagement section.
- 13.3. We have several mechanisms to facilitate student voice and are working to ensure that student voice is part of our decision making at all levels in the institution. These include:
- the deployment and use of student surveys at key points including welcome and transition as well as at the end of term through module evaluation.
  - student representation on all key committees, including but not limited to, the Board of Governors (and sub committees), Quality Enhancement Committee, University and Union Liaison Committee and Learning and Teaching workstream.
  - and the co-development of the student manifesto with the Students' Union.
- 13.4. The Student Union Liaison Committee meets at least six times a year to collaborate on issues related to the enhancement of the academic experience, improvements related to student engagement and satisfaction, the effectiveness of student communications and the implications of national policy changes. Most recently the university and union collaborated to sign the 'can't buy my silence' voluntary pledge to end the use of non-disclosure agreements for complaints about sexual harassment and bullying<sup>17</sup>.
- 13.5. In early 2022 the UPP Foundation<sup>50</sup> released a report on the effects of Covid on students which included a call to action for universities to partner with their students to develop a Student Futures Manifesto. We have worked with the Students' Union to develop a manifesto for our students with work strands for each of the six areas identified by the UPP Foundation. We are currently finalising student-led research to inform a needs analysis with a draft of the manifesto due to be published for consultation in February 2023.

## 14. Student Outcomes

14.1. Our academic experience was designed to ensure students continue and complete their course in a timely manner, so they can pursue their chosen careers. This section reviews our student outcomes performance in relation to our TEF data dashboard performance. This section will also outline how we ensure successful student outcomes through a holistic whole institution approach to student outcomes enhancement, as well as specific interventions designed to support specific student outcomes at relevant points in the student journey.

14.2. Our TEF student outcomes indicators were informed by the following samples over four years:

Indicator	Overall population	Full Time (%)	Part time (%)	Apprenticeship (%)
Continuation	19,390	13,320 (68.7%)	4900 (25.3%)	1170 (6%)
Completion	20,610	12,390 (60.1%)	8050 (39.1%)	170 (0.8%)
Progression	5,890	4,020 (68.3%)	1780 (30.2%)	90 (1.5%)

Table 3. TEF Dashboard sample size by student outcome indicator and study mode.

14.3. Full time study, our primary mode of delivery, accounts for over 60% of the student sample for each three student outcomes indicators.

14.4. Our overall TEF student outcomes indicators – continuation, completion and progression perform in line or above benchmark in all areas showing strong statistical evidence that all full-time study mode indicators are broadly in line with benchmark. We have particularly strong performance in the following areas where indicators are materially above benchmark:

- part-time continuation indicator is 80.6% which is 11.9pp above benchmark. (n=4900).
- part-time completion indicator is 73.1% which is 6.2pp above benchmark (n=8050).
- apprenticeship completion indicator is 83.5% which is 8.2pp above benchmark (n=170).
- apprenticeship progression indicator is 92.1% which is 5.8pp above benchmark (n=90).

## 15. A holistic approach to student outcomes

15.1. We use consistent approaches that target improvements in continuation, completion and progression. In this section we discuss our institutional approach to student outcomes enhancement including continuous course monitoring, user-based real-time reporting and the deployment of artificial intelligence.

15.2. We conduct continuous course monitoring (CCM) for all courses at two points in each academic year. Our CCM approach is comprehensive and from 2021/22 includes representatives from a range of relevant professional services (e.g. academic development, careers and employability) who attend and support the process which is led by academic course teams. CCM meetings are data-informed using a bespoke dashboard to facilitate conversations and actions related to the OfS B3 conditions, NSS results and progress on reducing differential outcomes. As part of the conversation we review emerging challenges, prioritise areas of focus, identify interventions and develop plans. This course-level scrutiny is complemented by applying a theory of change approach to emerging actions with clear lines of accountability that ensure enhancement.

15.3. Our Data and Business Intelligence function cascades real time data to relevant staff. In 2021 we moved from event-driven reporting to a user-based reporting platform through a stakeholder consultation process. As a result, staff monitor performance across a wide range of metrics in real time (e.g. learner analytics), enabling them to understand areas of good practice and potential risk issues so timely interventions are made. Platform usage has now

increased from 22,500 views a month under our event-driven reporting to 47,000 average monthly views for our user-based reports<sup>51</sup>.

## 16. Additional interventions to support continuation and completion

- 16.1. Our rigorous approach to induction and transition supports students to get in and get on with their studies. Our transition support is designed to support continuation and completion and begins prior to entry. The initial two-week induction period provides students with academic induction as well as a range of social events to support transition. Our quiet induction programme was introduced to support students with diverse needs to access induction in different ways. Our spiral approach to induction continues through term one to offer students access to a range of workshops to support mental health and financial health among others.
- 16.2. In academic year 2021/22 we developed an attendance and engagement monitoring dashboard to progress our learner analytic capacity to enable staff to respond to students at risk of disengaging with their course. Our attendance and engagement policy clarifies expectations around attendance and complements use of the dashboard, empowering academic mentors and course directors to provide the right information and the right support to ensure needs are met. Our attendance and engagement dashboard signals when students are disengaging and at risk of withdrawal, so we can reach out and support them to re-engage.

## 17. Our approach to enhance progression

- 17.1. Across the last three years of Graduate Outcomes data, over 75% of Staffordshire University graduates who came from Staffordshire found employment within Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent<sup>52</sup>. Approximately 10% of our graduates who joined the University from outside the region stayed in Staffordshire for their career.
- 17.2. Our graduate employment rate for students from the region who stayed in the region was an average of 72% over three years and was 79.8% for graduates who moved to Staffordshire for their studies<sup>53</sup>. These graduates that remain in the region support the economic development of our local area. Currently, only 44.5% of roles in Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire are recognised as graduate level (SOC 1-3) which is 3 pp below the West Midlands regional rate, and 6.9 pp below the national rate.
- 17.3. The employability support team bring industry, academics and students together through innovative events and activities to support graduate outcomes. Our annual GradEX and Connected Futures event attracts over 130 employers for each event to network with our students on campus facilitating interviews which lead to job/placement offers to students. At our June 2022 Grad Ex event, 51% of employers reported they made an offer to a student at the event and at the October 2022 Connected Futures event 43% employer respondents (n=67) reported they made an offer. Both events had high rates of satisfaction (over 80%) from our employer partners. One employer stated,  
*Students were passionate, asked great questions, were from relevant subjects. Had some great conversations and good footfall through the day. Support from digital services and speaking to academics was very useful. Catalyst is an excellent interactive space.*
- 17.4. Employability support for alumni continues well beyond graduation. Graduates can access the employability support team at any point in their career to receive one-to-one support without time limit. Our Graduate Projects Office (GPO) supports graduates who are unemployed or underemployed to transition successfully into the graduate labour market through a range of

interventions designed to improve skills and confidence as well as to provide work experience. The team had 3,549 interactions with graduates in the past 12 months using survey diagnostics to inform targeted calling campaigns. From 2022/23 the Peter Coates MSc Entrepreneurship will offer fully funded places for graduates and the wider community to further develop their business skills through an innovative curriculum and pitch for start up funding for an innovative business idea<sup>54</sup>. This qualification complements our entrepreneurial approach through our graduate start-up programme, Be-Inspired. Be-Inspired supports 40 students and graduates annually to set up their own business. Approximately 70% of our student start-ups are sustained over three years, retaining graduate talent in the region, boosting the local economy and creating jobs. The significant civic, social and economic impact of this programme was highlighted in the MillionPlus *Staying Local to Go Far* report<sup>55</sup>, with an estimated ROI of £2.28 returned for every £1 invested.

## 18. Educational Gains

- 18.1. Staffordshire University has a strong local identity, and the student demographic reflects the socio-economic mix of its most local communities (across all campuses). The University retains a large intake of over 19-year-old first degree entrants (71.1% of full time undergraduate new entrants recruited by Staffordshire University or a UK partner in 2021/22) as well as a large proportion of commuting students, which reflects the socio-economic complexities of our region, and therefore our learners. As a university we understand our communities and are deeply committed to “place” and the transformation of opportunities for all our students. Place-making and place-shaping are aspects of our genetic historical existence.
- 18.2. Our shared articulation of educational gains is rooted in the intersection of our commitment to place and our commitment to our learners. This understanding is reflected in all aspects of our student academic experience, from transition and induction, through the course portfolio designed to align with applied industry and enterprise graduate opportunities locally, but with transferability. Our learning and teaching modalities emphasise problem-solving, scenario responses and work-integrated curricula through our signature pedagogies of Phenomenon Based Learning and Simulation Based Education (detailed in **Student Experience**) as well as the learning space designs throughout our estate which are collaborative collision spaces for interdisciplinary approaches and proximity to business and enterprise learning (detailed in learning environment section in **Student Experience**). These digitally enhanced spaces and learning modalities underpin the needs of the future workforce and promote the digital capability of our learners as well as their support structures at home and in the community.
- 18.3. Our wide range of assessment practice also reflects the diversity of learner need and preferences offering a strong mix of authentic, innovative assessments designed to enable all learners to showcase their talents. Our students have success in competitive employer and professional body challenges with recent student commendation in the Institute of Materials 2022 Starpack Student Design Competition<sup>56</sup> and Institution of Mechanical Engineers 2021 Formula Student awards<sup>57</sup> to name a few.
- 18.4. We support our students to maximise their academic experience and realise their ambitions by enabling the absorption of student learning through scaffolding that experience with academic support of course directors and academic mentors, peer to peer mentoring support and our ongoing transitions support.
- 18.5. The university has a clear focus on the career and work readiness of our learners, and this is reflected in the academic experience as well as in the diversity of higher learning and industry-led qualifications we offer, so that all types and aspirations of our learners can be met.



- 18.6. The *individual* educational gains for learners at Staffordshire University, therefore, are the transformative outcomes of higher education participation: independence and self-efficacy, higher level knowledge and skills, graduate level work readiness, and collaborative and responsive problem-solving. In addition, our academic experience delivers excellence in digital innovation, entrepreneurial skills and behaviours and extensive, tailored subject specific and transferable work integrated learning curricula for all students.
- 18.7. These educational gains are clearly reflected in our strategic mission and are specifically articulated through the core purposes of our *next generation* and their successful delivery is evidenced by our above benchmark metrics.
- 18.8. As described above, our strategic intent informs, and is informed by, the intersection of our learners and our place. For Staffordshire University that means we also pay attention to the *collective* educational gains of our learners and how these transform opportunities in our region and its communities.

## 19. Developing our educational gains

- 19.1. As we move forward, the University continues to be agile and responsive to changing educational dynamics. Our principal articulation of educational gains remains, but the way in which we deliver and the ways in which learners can best access and navigate those gains, continually evolves. For example, the University is committed to facilitating the success of the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) to increase the numbers of local learners accessing higher education at different stages of their learning and career journeys. We will continue to build our modular qualification portfolio having engaged in the Office for Students short course pilot, for which we co-designed and delivered modular learning with our Further Education partners and local businesses. We are developing our portfolio by launching a further suite of micro credentials (MCs) as both an additional route to access and engagement in further and higher learning and for delivering MCs in partnership with the Staffordshire Chambers of Commerce, via the Local Skills Improvement Plan, to meet the current and future skills' needs of the local economy, thus supporting a regional inclusive growth strategy.
- 19.2. Our commitment to educational gains is how we play our part to "level up" the region. For our students, our approach to educational gains is implemented through our academic strategy. We are already building an evidence base for excellence in the following educational gains: subject-specific knowledge and career and work readiness.

## 20. Subject-specific knowledge and skills

- 20.1. Supporting the development of subject-specific knowledge and skills are a core way in which we contribute to the educational gains of our students. Our academic strategy was designed ensure curriculum content uses both theory-knowledge building and practical skills' development so students thrive in their chosen sector. We rose four places to 68<sup>th</sup> in the 2023 Guardian University Guide due to our improved performance from in the 'value added' indicator (3.6 score in 2022 to 5.6 score) which measures how effective students are taught through subject-specific knowledge and skills acquisition<sup>58</sup>.
- 20.2. In 2020 and 2021 we used the NSS optional item 'Practical activities on my course have helped me to learn' to understand how practice-based learning contributed to subject specific skills development. Table 3 shows our performance in 2020 and 2021 which demonstrates higher levels of agreement from our students than the sector average for both years<sup>59</sup>. It is important to note the possible effect of the pandemic as both Staffordshire and the sector experienced a reduction in satisfaction from 2020 to 2021.

Practical activities on my course have helped me to learn.	2020 % (n)	2021% (n)
Staffordshire University	83.35 (1068)	75.90 (1129)
England	78.6 (36,471)	72.53(36,799)

Table 4. % agree 'Practical activities on my course have helped me to learn' by year compared to sector.

- 20.3. In 2022, we made a change to our optional question set to better understand the relationship between perception of skills development and ability to progress into a chosen career.
- 20.4. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of respondents (n=1187) agreed that the skills they developed during their time in HE will be useful for their future career compared to the sector average of 83% (n=53600)<sup>60</sup>.
- 20.5. We conducted interviews with student ambassadors about their academic experience and whether they believed that the time at university supported their development<sup>61</sup>. One student felt that their time at Staffordshire University had created the conditions for them to feel secure enough to contribute opinions and share ideas. The same student noted that they were now excelling in a subject in which they had struggled in the past:
- I did engineering at high school and I got a 'U'... I've been thinking about that quite recently because I'm on track for a first now, which is, you know, arguably the best grade you can get and a 'U' is literally ungraded.*

## 21. Career readiness

- 21.1. Our academic strategy was designed to develop work ready graduates (see **Employability Skills Development** section). We have two main institutional-level indicators to assess the career readiness of our students (apart from progression indicators): NSS careers and employability/skills optional question sets and careers registration data
- 21.2. Both indicators measure self-report career readiness and career planning. In 2022 we amended our NSS optional question sets to include the careers as well as employability and skills question sets. We outperform the sector average for all six items in the two question sets<sup>62</sup>. Highlights from these question sets include:
- 87% of respondents (n=1187) agreed that the skills they developed during their time in HE will be useful for their career compared to the sector average of 83% (n=53600).
  - 84% of respondents (n=1192) agreed that as a result of their course they believe they have improved their career prospects compared to the sector average of 80% (n=28191).
  - 78% of respondents (n=1187) agreed that their HE experience has helped them plan for their future career compared to the sector average of 70%.
- 21.3. The completion of careers registration data has been optional at enrolment for two years but has been made compulsory for academic year 2022/23. Careers registration data allows us to monitor whether students are improving their career readiness as they progress through each level of study.
- 21.4. We matched a total sample of 4,352 undergraduate students with their careers registration data reported at Level 4 and their data reported at the commencement of Level 6 study. We found that 62% of matched students reported increased career readiness after three years of study<sup>63</sup>.
- 21.5. We also contribute to our regional development through the delivery of the following collective educational gains:
- graduates stay and contribute to the local economy.
  - increased access and participation in higher education.

- increased ability for our hard-to-reach communities to effectively participate in society.
- increased supply of high-quality jobs in Stoke through effective business engagement.

21.6. For the purpose of this submission, we will focus on the evidence available for *graduates stay and contribute to the local economy*. Our careers registration collects student self-report data on geographic mobility plans at each level of study. The data suggests that students are more likely to want to stay and work in the region after three years of study. There was a 13 pp increase in the self-report likelihood (n=4352) of staying and working in the region from Level 4 (36%) to Level 6 (49%) for all students<sup>64</sup>. There was an 11 pp increase in the self-report likelihood of staying and working in the region from Level 4 (64%) to Level 6 (75%) from Staffordshire students<sup>65</sup>.

21.7. Our educational gains are key to our strategy as a purposeful anchor institution, delivering individual learner and collective place-based educational gains to meet the needs and aspirations of our students. We have developed measurement and evaluation mechanisms through two survey techniques which will enable us to continue to develop our understanding of students' self-perception of gains, their self-efficacy, meta-cognition and confidence, which then translates into positive outcomes and therefore transformed life opportunities for people, place and society. This work will support our demonstration of excellence for the next TEF submission.

## 22. Conclusion

22.1. Staffordshire University is a catalyst for change for our students and our region. This submission articulates how we implement this vision to deliver the learning and teaching excellence reflected in our TEF data dashboard performance. Our diverse student groups often face multiple barriers, but we pride ourselves in our ability to equip students with the skills and support they need to succeed. Our success with this is reflected both in the evidence within this submission and in our indicator performance. This clearly demonstrates the excellence of our academic offer, and the significant educational gains Staffordshire University delivers which reflect strategic intent.

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