

University of Sussex – Submission for TEF 2023

1. Provider context

1.1. Our educational mission and strategic aims

The University of Sussex gained its Royal Charter in 1961 and was, from the beginning, ground-breaking in setting out an educational mission focused on interdisciplinary innovation, social justice, and inclusion, underpinned by academic excellence rooted in strong disciplines. This submission for TEF 2023 shows how these distinctive origins have shaped our commitment to delivering a transformational student experience that generates positive outcomes and educational gains for students in the 21st century.

In 2018, we launched [Sussex 2025: A Better University for a Better World](#), the strategic framework that sets out research, education, engagement and international strategies within an explicit commitment to institutional values of kindness, inclusion, collaboration, courage, and integrity. These have been foundational to our *Learn to Transform* education strategy, which has guided the University's work through the TEF period, seeking to provide *a distinctive, student-centred, digitally-advanced education, through enhanced curricula, with a focus on student well-being, and producing world citizens, and research practitioners*.

In 2022, with the appointment of our new Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sasha Roseneil (FAcSS PFHEA), we are renewing and refreshing our strategic approach, consolidating and extending our commitments to environmental sustainability and human flourishing as themes that structure our educational offer, our research, and our institutional life. Our students are central to this endeavour: they are key partners in the co-creation of the curriculum; they work with our academics as researchers; and they challenge established knowledge and practices, including those of the University itself. As illustrated in this submission, their compassion, energy, and commitment bring positive and meaningful changes, not only within our own University community, but also well beyond Sussex.

Sussex has a record of direct involvement in major national and global matters of concern throughout our history, from pioneering work on science policy for the UN in the 1960s, to student and staff opposition to apartheid in 1960s, 70s and 80s. Today, our students and staff continue to be engaged in addressing key challenges of the contemporary world, such as global development, human rights and social justice, climate change and sustainability, understanding the significance of genetics in disease, and drug discovery, amongst many more. We produce world-leading insights in new and emerging research areas, including AI, digital media, human consciousness, and quantum technologies. As one of the top 30 multi-disciplinary universities in the UK for research ([THE REF 2021 results](#)), Sussex is an institution that immerses students in an environment of world-leading and internationally excellent research: five Nobel Prize winners have been staff at Sussex, as well as at least 15 Fellows of the Royal Society, 12 Fellows of the British Academy, 23 Fellows of the Academy of Social Sciences, and winners of the Crafoord Prize, the Bancroft Prize, and Royal Society of Literature prizes. This year, five members of our current staff were named as among the top 1% of most-cited researchers in the world ([Clarivate Analytics Highly Cited Researchers 2022](#)).

Our research, curriculum and teaching focus on developing knowledge, ideas, and practical interventions that make a positive difference in the world – locally, regionally, nationally, and globally. In particular, our fundamental commitment to sustainable development is a defining feature of Sussex. **The University has been ranked 1st in the world for Development Studies for the last six years** ([QS World University Rankings](#)), and the *Times Higher Education* World Impact

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

Rankings place us 37th out of 1400 institutions when assessed against the UN Sustainable Development Goals. **In the first QS Sustainability University Rankings (2023), we were ranked 3rd in the UK for our ‘Sustainable Institutions’ score and our overall ranking for sustainability was 55th in the world.**

In addition to these achievements, during the TEF period we have received a number of prestigious awards for different aspects of our education and student experience, further details of which are provided throughout the document. We highlight, in particular, the following awards:

- [The 2022 Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide University of the Year for Student Retention award](#)
- [The Pearson HE Innovate 2022 Award for Student Support for our Foundation Year team](#)
- [The 2021 Studyportals Global Award for Student Diversity](#)
- [The 2021 Association of Graduate Careers and Advisory Services \(AGCAS\) Employability Award for growth in student placements](#)
- [The 2020 and 2021 Higher Education Business Continuity Network award for Incident Management during Covid](#)
- [The 2021 Association of Graduate Careers and Advisory Services \(AGCAS\) Supporting Student / Graduate Employability Award](#)

While we have recently developed transnational education (TNE) initiatives (described below), the vast majority of our undergraduates are taught on our beautiful campus. Located on the edge of the South Downs National Park and in close proximity to the vibrant city of Brighton and Hove, the Sussex campus combines iconic modernist Grade 1 and II* listed buildings designed by Sir Basil Spence with contemporary buildings and residences. Our commitment to sustainability and biodiversity sees us increasing the proportion of our campus that is set aside for nature (currently 38%), and engaging students in educational projects, discussions, and institutional decision-making about these issues. The campus provides a unique environment for broad-ranging educational provision that meets the needs of a diverse student population, as set out below.

1.2. The size and shape of our provision

Our taught curriculum is delivered in over 250 undergraduate and 60 postgraduate degrees. In the 2021/22 academic year, Sussex had 18,089 students (14,222 undergraduate, 3,868 postgraduate) across nine academic Schools of Study: Education and Social Work (ESW) (289 UG students); Engineering and Informatics (1,204); Global Studies (1,038); Law, Politics and Sociology (LPS) (2,112); Life Sciences (1,183); Mathematics and Physical Sciences (MPS) (324); Media, Arts and Humanities (MAH) (2,121); Psychology (1,642); and the University of Sussex Business School (USBS) (3,655). A further 200 undergraduates are admitted each year to the Brighton and Sussex Medical School (BSMS, established in 2002), a School of Study that is operated in partnership with the University of Brighton (909 undergraduate students in 2021/22). In addition, in 2022, 657 students were registered on our Foundation Year programmes. Since 2017/18 our undergraduate population has grown by 11%. Our TEF data relates to all these student groups. [Note that the submission for the University of Brighton will also include BSMS data].

We are in the process of increasing our TNE provision. In 2020, we launched The Sussex Artificial Intelligence Institute, Zhejiang Gongshang University (ZJSU). The Institute offers undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in Robotics and in Artificial Intelligence, with an intake of 100 a year on each undergraduate degree.

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

Sussex's student body is a highly diverse community with an international outlook – and we positively embrace this. In our 2021/22 HESA data, 37% of our undergraduates identified as having an ethnicity other than white (with the highest proportion Asian, at 19%). International students, of 137 nationalities, made up 25% of our undergraduate student body. 25% of undergraduates declared a disability (including 10% with a mental health condition). 54% were recorded as female, 46% as male and % as neither male nor female (including, for example, non-binary). % identified as having a different gender from the sex registered at birth. 15% of our students identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Other Sexuality, and Sussex has a particularly strong tradition as a university that has welcomed and positively included LGBTQ+ students. As a result of our positive approach to diversity, **we were awarded the Global Award for Student Diversity in the Studyportals [Global Satisfaction Awards 2021](#)**. These awards are based on reviews from students around the world. In 2021, 108,000 reviews were received from students at 4,000 universities. The Student Diversity Award asked students to rate how friendly the atmosphere at their university was for people from diverse backgrounds – including different countries, cultures, religions, ages, genders – and for those with additional needs, and we were delighted to be recognised as the best in the world.

Each of our Schools embodies and facilitates the ethos of interdisciplinarity rooted in strong disciplines. This has been at the heart of Sussex since our inception. Opportunities for interdisciplinarity are embedded in our portfolio of degree programmes, notably through *Sussex Choice*, which is an exciting portfolio of electives and pathways available across the University, as well as joint honours degrees and major/minor programmes, which involve a specific commitment to two or more disciplinary areas. All single honours students have the opportunity to choose from an extensive selection of elective modules from across all Schools during their first and second years. This enables students on arts, humanities and social science degrees to take electives in the sciences, and vice versa. More generally, even within specific degree courses and modules, there is close attention to diverse disciplinary perspectives. This deep-rooted educational commitment to interdisciplinarity across all our taught courses is aligned with the way in which Sussex brings together world-leading scholars to tackle research challenges at the intersection of disciplines, from sustainability and quantum technology, through to neuroscience and digital humanities.

Each School of Study has a Head of School who is responsible for both overall academic experience and student support, with a senior management team that includes a Director of Teaching and Learning and a Director of Student Experience. Heads of School are represented on the University Executive Group and are members of Senate, the academic governing body of the University. Within each School of Study, there is also a focused team of professional services staff and academics who support the student experience. These teams are linked to our central professional services, of which the Division for the Student Experience is key. The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) has overall responsibility for teaching provision and student experience and works with both School and central professional service colleagues to this end, supported by two Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellors. All Directors of Teaching and Learning are members of the University Education Committee, which in turn reports to Senate, and thence to Council. Our Council also has a dedicated Student Experience Committee.

Student engagement is embedded through formal and informal committees at both School and University level, providing opportunities for feedback on current provision as well as a voice in the development, validation and approval of new programmes. Student representatives and officers are elected each year as part of the University of Sussex Students' Union (USSU), and play a critical and proactive role in shaping our approach to education and student experience. As detailed below, student representatives meet regularly with academic staff to review student feedback, agree on

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

actions, and monitor impacts. They also sit on a wide range of School and University committees, including the University Education Committee, the University's Senate, and Council. In addition to working with representatives from USSU, in 2019, Sussex established the *Student Connector Programme*, in which students and staff work together as equal partners, collaborating on specific projects to co-create activities that improve the student experience. *Student Connectors* have played important roles in developing new approaches to careers support, embedding technology in learning, and even designing new modules.

The key projects designed to deliver our *Learn to Transform* education strategy are overseen by an Education & Students Portfolio Steering Group (reporting to University Education Committee), which ensures coherence across institutional initiatives aimed at addressing issues of strategic importance (e.g. awarding gaps, assessment approaches, technological enhancements to learning, employability). Specific examples of benefits derived from these initiatives are provided below.

Sussex and COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic brought Sussex the same challenges faced by all universities, but we have been recognised in various ways for having been sector-leading in our response. This included winning the Higher Education Business Continuity Network (HEBCoN) awards for [Innovation and Breakthrough and Incident Management \(2021\)](#) and [Covid Pandemic Response \(2022\)](#). During the pandemic, as at all times, the University of Sussex prioritised the health and safety of the people within our community. We led the way within the sector in encouraging all students to get vaccinated, including via our incentive scheme, with prizes of £5,000 for double-jabbed students, and by running a pop-up vaccination centre on campus. Following student feedback, we were one of the first universities to return to in-person teaching after the COVID-19 lockdowns. Teaching and learning are currently, and will continue to be, in-person and on campus (apart from our specific online distance learning and transnational education provision). Nonetheless, we are learning from the enforced move online, facilitating more blended teaching and student support where this enhances inclusivity and the student experience, more details of which are provided below.

1.3. The context for our submission

The University has carefully scrutinised the metrics that accompany this submission. Well over half of all indicators and split categories within them (65%) are 'broadly in line with, or above, benchmarks' to a level of certainty above 80% and can therefore be considered evidence of 'very high-quality provision'. There are three categories for which performance is so high (approaching 100%) that the data are suppressed. There are 22 categories where the benchmark exceeds 95% and would therefore be deemed outstanding quality. The data indicate that we are materially below benchmark with <80% certainty for Academic Support, and below benchmark with ≥80% certainty for Assessment and Feedback, Student Voice, and Progression. We address these metrics and our strategies for improving them in the following sections. Central to our education enhancement initiatives are: the overarching *Learn to Transform* strategy; our University-wide *Student Connector Programme*; ongoing dialogue with USSU Student Representatives; Schools of Study-based action and recovery plans to address student experience and the key areas covered by the National Student Survey (NSS); the development of a University-wide education community of practice (*Dare to Transform*); and a comprehensive institutional review of our curriculum design and delivery, *Curriculum Reimagined*.

Our Students' Union officers and staff have been engaged with the TEF exercise and have actively participated in the TEF Steering Group meetings that helped shape this submission. In addition, the University has supported the student submission by providing some funding for focus groups and

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

assisting with publicity for the focus groups. We have not, however, influenced the production or content of their submission in any way.

In what follows, we both outline our areas of excellence and address aspects of our provision that appear from the metrics to be weaker. We submit evidence that goes beyond the NSS and student outcome data, especially for Progression. While important, the NSS indicators are not necessarily direct measures of features of excellence, so we draw on additional information, including our internal surveys and external examiners' reports. We also elaborate on the significance of our research-led teaching and the ways in which employer engagement contributes to academic experience. Evidence is provided to illustrate the ways in which support for staff professional development informs this, and we discuss the improvement measures that have been put in place across the University to ensure the excellence of student experience and outcomes at Sussex.

2. Student experience

2.1. Academic experience and assessment

SE1. Outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment processes that are highly effective and tailored to students

In the NSS 2022, our teaching scored on average 79.1% (excluding BSMS, which is how the data are published). The average score disguises considerable variation: 53% of our Subject Areas (including Medicine, within BSMS) scored in excess of 80% for teaching quality, with scores above 90% for Anthropology, Childhood and Youth Studies, Physical Geography, Pharmacy, English Language, and History of Art. Nonetheless, the overall result is not where we would like it to be, and we have both interrogated the data and put in place recovery plans to achieve improvements. In contrast to these NSS scores, our external examiners comment positively on the quality of the teaching provision and robustness of assessment in all Schools (see below). It is also noteworthy that, although Sussex has, like many universities, faced several periods of industrial action, we have been relatively successful in mitigating their effects. Of the 37 universities participating in five weeks of industrial action in 2021/22, Sussex was one of only 14 to see an improvement in Overall Satisfaction in the NSS.

To monitor and improve teaching quality, and in order to respond rapidly to student feedback, we conduct both mid-module and end-of-semester evaluation for all modules, wherein students are invited to respond to short questions about their experience on each module. The most recent (autumn 2022) mid-module evaluations had 7,464 respondents, of whom 4,865 were undergraduates. These evaluations highlighted that 85% of students felt teaching on the module 'helped make the content clear'. Of the approximately 4,000 free text comments, about 1,000 praised specific teachers and interactive teaching in seminars and laboratories. Key patterns identified in the analysis of these data fed immediately into guidance for staff to improve student experience in that module, that term. For example, in the most recent round of mid-module evaluations, we identified anxiety about assessment as a recurring theme, so teaching staff were encouraged to set aside additional time in the second half of the teaching term to discuss this with their students, recognising the specific needs of current students following the years of pandemic-related educational disruption.

Sussex's NSS data on assessment and feedback are also below benchmark and we have been working hard to understand and address this. We have found that weaknesses in scores for assessment and feedback might be attributed to a range of factors, including delays in marks released and confusion about where to obtain this information.

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

Over the last two years, therefore, we have put in place a series of co-ordinated projects across the University, including co-created, student-friendly language for assessment rubrics, standardised approaches to feedback, and investment in up-to-date and user-friendly digital interfaces to access feedback, particularly for mobile access. The release of marks to students will be clearer with our new student records system, which is contracted to roll out in autumn 2024. Our external examiners, who have direct access to all feedback given to students, frequently applaud its quality and comprehensiveness, as illustrated below. We also have robust internal processes for monitoring the quality and timeliness of feedback via Canvas, our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). We aim to provide formal feedback within 15 working days, and our monitoring indicates that this target is generally met. School examination boards receive information on adherence to feedback deadlines, and any identified difficulties are addressed through adjustments to the course assessment schedule and/or individual faculty workload allocation, as appropriate.

Examples of positive comments from external examiners on assessment and feedback 2021/22

Humanities and Social Science Schools

The feedback that I have reviewed has been fair, developmental and constructive. I have been impressed by the consistently high standard of feedback (and “feed forward”) that has been offered to students (USBS)...Feedback is excellent across the board, with specific areas of improvement pinpointed for students which should enable them to improve their work in future (ESW)...I was impressed with the amount and quality of the feedback on the sample assessments I received. There is a clear culture of encouraging students to improve, both by pointing out what they did well and by identifying clear and actionable areas for improvement (Global Studies)...The levels of feedback are very high...it is the best approach to feedback I have seen – students will be greatly assisted by it as they progress through their degrees (LPS)...The detailed, constructive, and positive feedback given to students always stands out for me. I note that all staff seem to engage in such detailed feedback. (MAH).

Science Schools

In most cases, the marking criteria was excellent and supported with a detailed rubric (EngInf)...The entire process for assessment and examination is rigorous, fair and effective. All marks are double checked to ensure consistency and fairness (LifeSci)...The marking criteria are appropriate, and again in line with what I have seen at other institutions (MPS)...Students are very concerned about knowing what the marking criteria are which will be used to judge their work. Sussex is very developed in communicating marking criteria to students, to answer students’ concerns. (Psychology)

In the light of such comments, our internal checks (on the extent to which students have viewed their feedback on the VLE), and School-based focus groups, we have identified that students often do not realise that they are receiving feedback and do not consistently access the formal feedback that is provided. As part of our *Learn to Transform* education strategy, and working in collaboration with students, we are therefore focusing on ensuring that assessment and feedback are in forms that are of value to students, and are clearly accessible and understood.

The ways in which the Schools have improved their assessment and feedback practices over the last two years have included: ‘feedback weeks’ in which students have access to lecturers for extra feedback sessions; ensuring marking criteria are clearly available for every assignment; adding extra

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

'feed-forward' sessions before assignments are due; and personalised reports to students after in-class tests. These initiatives will result in improved NSS results for assessment and feedback in future years as students who have encountered these practices become finalists. In 2022, early signs of this were manifest in a small improvement in our Assessment and Feedback results.

We are also reviewing the timing, format, and content of our assessments over academic years 2022/23 and 2023/24 through *Curriculum Reimagined*, mentioned above. The outcomes of this review will include a clear framework for the use of an inclusive range of summative and formative assessments, reduction of the assessment burden, and revisions to submission deadlines to mitigate the 'bunching' of assessments, all of which are at the root of much student anxiety.

SE2. Inspirational course content and delivery that engage, challenge and enable students to reach their potential

Both internal and external reviews of our courses regularly point to inspirational course content and delivery that expand students' horizons and offer maximum opportunity for them to excel, not just in mastering relevant subject-specific knowledge and transferable skills, but also in recognising their relevance to wider societal and global challenges.

For example, as noted earlier, Sussex's commitment to sustainability has been recognised as sector-leading, and this has involved collaborative work with students to ensure that sustainability is embedded throughout our educational offering. Recently, Sussex students worked with the external group, Students Organising for Sustainability, to audit our entire curriculum for its sustainability content and related pedagogical approaches. The resulting report showed the breadth and depth of our provision on sustainability (Students Organising for Sustainability 2022).

There are many ways in which sustainability appears across our curriculum. For example, Global Studies, Life Sciences, and USBS offer core sustainability-focused modules. Other Schools also teach on sustainability-related themes. For instance, the undergraduate module, *Forest Food Garden*, enables students to grow and harvest forest food on campus. Our Product Design degree offers a module on the circular economy, enabling students to find ways of designing without creating waste. In partnership with the Environmental Law Foundation, our *Environmental Justice Law Clinic* gives law students the opportunity to develop their world readiness, employability and interpersonal skills, and to help the local community. This has included advising on environmental justice issues, such as noise pollution and biodiversity conservation, and researching the incorporation of sustainability criteria in neighbourhood plans. We are also about to become official research partner to the [Knepp Estate](#), a beacon for conservation in the UK. Sussex students and staff will be involved in research activity to show how the decline in wildlife can be reversed in a very short space of time, even on post-agricultural land and in some of the most populated parts of the country.

Each of our courses is formally reviewed by the owning School through Annual Course Review (ACR) and by the University through Annual Portfolio Review. Drawing on both internal and external data, the ACR process ensures academic rigour and high standards. These formal reviews also enable us to identify innovations and excellence to share across the University.

Examples of innovative content and delivery were evident in our Schools' responses to COVID-19. For instance, where placement activities had become unavailable, colleagues designed creative solutions to enable students to continue to undertake work-related activity, such as: the replacement of placements with professional projects; the transfer of industrial presentations to an online delivery format; and the creation of animated films by staff to support practice-based learning. Methods to maintain student engagement included the use of online 'cafes' to provide additional support, feedback Padlets, and learning diaries.

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

In Life Sciences, mini science practicals in a box were sent to students' homes during COVID-19 for the modules Animal and Plant Behavioural Ecology, Human Physiology and Metabolism, Genetics and Population Genetics. There was very positive feedback from students about how it 'gave us something practical to do even when we couldn't come in'.

In Engineering and Informatics, some hardware-based practical work was successfully replaced with the equivalent simulation-based approach during the pandemic. In addition, an equipment loan procedure was developed, which gave students the opportunity to continue developing practical skills when they could not access onsite engineering laboratories.

In MAH, online delivery was especially challenging for practice-based subjects but teaching was adapted to ensure the best possible experience for students. Drama, for example, adapted practical workshop and performance-making tasks to suit the virtual environment, hosting live/virtual hybrid performance projects in the Attenborough Centre for the Creative Arts (ACCA) (see below) and in two virtual performance festivals.

SE3. Research-led teaching and pedagogic research ensure an outstanding academic experience

Our ambition: Our students will have the opportunity to develop their knowledge, skills and competencies through active engagement with the pressing research questions and challenges of our time. They will enhance their skills by working independently and collectively on topics of mutual interest and significance. They will become members of research groups, centres, networks and initiatives and work alongside academics and doctoral researchers, as well as drawing on wider partnerships beyond the University. These research-practitioner and team-working experiences will provide valuable skills to help our students succeed in the workplace and communities of the future, and as citizens in the world of tomorrow. (Sussex 2025: Learn to Transform strategy).

We are a research-intensive university and our world-leading and internationally excellent research underpins our *Learn to Transform* strategy. REF 2021 recognised the quality and impact of our research. The University of Sussex was ranked 27th of all UK institutions for both 'Research Power' and 'Market Share' according to Times Higher Education (THE). REF 2021 found that 89% of research activity submitted by Sussex is either 'world-leading' (40.6%) or 'internationally excellent' (48.4%). This is also research that makes a difference in the world: 93% of our research impact was assessed to be 'outstanding' or 'very considerable' – up from 80.7% in 2014. Of our 885 research active staff who were included in REF 2021, 80% are directly involved in teaching, and our curriculum is research-led across all Schools.

Research both shapes and informs our teaching, and our undergraduate students learn to critically assess research, to pose research questions themselves, and to apply research methods and skills, ensuring that our courses are rigorous, challenging, and up-to-date. Our researchers are centrally involved in undergraduate teaching and we also have a number of colleagues conducting pedagogical research that then informs our provision. Dr Susan Smith, for example, led projects in USBS informed by her scholarly research on assessment criteria and rubrics (Smith et al. 2021). Dr Wendy Garnham (Psychology) founded our *Active Learning Network (ALN)*, which grew to influence pedagogic practice at Sussex, including in our Foundation Year programme (which was winner of the 2019 Advance HE Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence and also received a Pearson HE Innovate award in 2022 for the most innovative approach to supporting students). The ALN has also been influential throughout the sector via 20 satellite networks, continuing professional development events, and conferences at institutions across the UK and internationally.

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

Across all Schools our curriculum is designed so that at levels four and five students are introduced to the core elements of their discipline or interdisciplinary area. By level six, they take specialist modules that build on the research expertise of our academics. At this level, students carry out their own research in the form of projects or dissertations that typically involve primary data collection and analysis. Several of our departments (e.g. Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry) offer bespoke undergraduate research placements, while Geography offers a research-based national and international fieldwork module. The School of Life Sciences also hosts the *Living Lab*, a large-scale field experiment in which our undergraduate students learn about biodiversity. Launched in December 2021, we established 12 sites across our campus to assess and monitor biodiversity and how it is influenced by different management regimes and disturbance regimes.

Undergraduate students are also able to apply to take part in the *Junior Research Associate* scheme. This provides bursaries to enable outstanding undergraduates to undertake an intensive eight-week, full-time research project with an experienced University of Sussex researcher during the summer vacation. This scheme has grown substantially in response to student demand and a record 96 bursaries were awarded in 2022, of which 40 were ringfenced for students from widening participation backgrounds. More than 800 students have participated since 2008. Comprehensive training is provided to students, and an annual poster exhibition is held which displays the students' research findings.

2.2. Resources, support and student engagement

SE4. Outstanding support for staff professional development and excellence embedded across the provider

An outstanding student experience can only be achieved by passionate teachers who are supported, valued and recognised for their contribution to education. We have designed and delivered a range of initiatives to support and recognise our lecturers and others who enhance the education experience.

Our teaching staff are employed on either Education and Research (E&R) or Education and Scholarship (E&S) academic pathways. The pathways are accorded equal status and have clearly established routes for promotion and professional development, including to Professor level. At present we have just over 300 academic staff on the E&S pathway, and 885 academic staff on the E&R pathway. In addition, teaching is supported by Doctoral Tutors and School Tutors, as well as by highly-skilled laboratory and other technicians.

We provide training for our teaching staff that leads to Fellowship of the HEA. This training is primarily delivered by colleagues in the School of Education and Social Work, supported by academic developers from the Educational Enhancement team, and is underpinned by the pedagogical research referred to above. Doctoral students who teach and academics who are new to teaching must undertake the *Fundamentals of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* module. This introduces key principles and practices of teaching and learning, and successful completion leads to Associate Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (AFHEA - D1 of the UKPSF). The module is offered multiple times a year, with face-to-face and online modalities available. The course has excellent feedback and enables approximately 100 participants each year to begin their higher education teaching with skills that maximise the likelihood of a successful teaching and learning experience for both staff and students.

In addition, new probationary lecturers with less than three years' consecutive teaching experience are expected to complete the Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Learning in HE (PGCertHE). This programme recruits around 60 participants each year and feedback is also very positive.

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

Lecturers with more than three years' experience of teaching when joining Sussex are invited to take the Portfolio Route of the PGCertHE course to support their pedagogic development. Successful completion of either of these programmes leads to Fellowship of the HEA (D2 of the UKPSF). Central elements of the PGCertHE are training in inclusive, ethical, and sustainable teaching, teaching with digital technologies, and critical and reflective practice, closely aligned to the *Learn to Transform* strategy. Probationary staff receive a workload allowance to facilitate completion of the PGCertHE.

For colleagues who are mentoring and leading others in relation to teaching and learning, we offer support for Senior Fellowship of the FHEA. This is offered via training workshops, online resources, and focused writing days. We currently have 41 Senior Fellows at Sussex (21 of whom have applied in the last three years). In addition, the number of Principal Fellows (PFHEA) has been increasing and currently stands at five.

Educational enhancement

Dare to Transform is a University-wide umbrella network to support academic colleagues to undertake initiatives that enhance scholarly practice within our education provision, and that encourage educational experimentation and systematic evaluation and research into education practice. *Dare to Transform* serves as a vehicle for promoting and sharing the outputs and outcomes of scholarship and pedagogical activities across the University. These activities include a seminar series to support colleagues with the development of their own scholarship, a mentoring programme for the Education & Scholarship academic career pathway, and a community of practice to bring academics together to share good practice, gain support with pedagogical scholarship projects, and showcase scholarship output. Over the past two years there have been 27 pan-University network events, involving hundreds of staff at all levels. Many of these have featured nationally recognised experts in the scholarship of teaching and learning. They have resulted in publications that include Smith and Watson's (2022) work on the international awarding gap, published in the [Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice](#); and Pranjol, Oprandi and Watson (2022) on project-based learning in biomedical sciences, published in the [Journal of Biological Education](#).

Our professional services Educational Enhancement team consists of 22 people working across three functions: academic development, learning technologies, and online distance learning. The unit disseminates and helps to embed best practice in all aspects of teaching, learning, and assessment across the University. It also communicates and celebrates the success of this work. A comprehensive programme of face-to-face and online professional development opportunities is produced each term, complemented by a seminar series of invited external experts and an online repository of training resources and case studies of good practice from across the institution. In addition, one-to-one educational technology skills training is provided to new members of teaching staff when they arrive at Sussex.

By way of example, in Semester 2 of 2021/22, 85 sessions were delivered by the Educational Enhancement team to 475 staff, on topics such as *Designing Authentic Assessment* and *Using PollEverywhere*. A recent addition to the portfolio of development opportunities for staff has been a programme specifically for course leaders that consists of sessions run across the academic year on topics including pedagogy, curriculum, and the annual course review process. There are currently 40 course leaders taking the programme. At School level, expert academic developers and learning technologists support discipline-specific requirements, whilst bringing cross-institutional consistency and sharing the latest innovations in practice. Recently, the Educational Enhancement team has introduced institutional training and support for applications for National Teaching Fellowships (NTFs).

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

We recognise the importance of encouraging and celebrating excellent academic practice and initiatives that enhance the student experience. The *Sussex Education Awards* were relaunched in 2018/19 as part of our *Learn to Transform* strategy, and each year there is a well-attended award ceremony. For these awards, students are able to nominate outstanding staff (individuals, teams and student-staff partnerships) under the categories of 'Teaching to Disrupt', 'Transformative Technology', 'Better World', 'Learning Together', and 'Sussex Spirit'.

A new *Education Innovation Fund* was launched in October 2022. Over three years, this will provide a total of £50,000 each year, with up to £5,000 per individual project. This year's fund will favour projects that focus on student feedback, as well as those that aim to enhance student voice and assessment.

SE5. A supportive learning environment in which students have access to a wide and readily available range of outstanding quality academic support, tailored to their needs.

An integrated architecture of inclusive academic and pastoral student support at Sussex is structured through the Schools of Study, the Library, the Student Centre, and USSU, which are described in the sections below.

Every student benefits from academic and pastoral support that is offered both within their School and by our central Support Services, largely based in the Student Centre. Each School has its own dedicated student experience team, comprising academic and professional services colleagues, which is able to escalate to the central Support Services for more specialist intervention whenever necessary.

School-based support is tailored to disciplinary and professional expectations and involves a combination of 1:1 academic advising, peer-to-peer mentoring, and specialist provision. Academic advising, wherein students receive advice and support from academics, remains a foundation of our provision and is designed to ensure a consistent level of advising across all subject areas. We also recognise the increasing need for specialist support in areas such as academic skills and careers planning and the need for greater psychological and welfare support. We have responded to this by creating Academic Success Advisors and similar roles across Schools.

In addition to its core provision, our University Library runs a range of additional study support programmes. These include the *Royal Literary Fund Fellowship Scheme*, which offers 1:1 tutorials to students to improve their writing skills, as well as workshops on revision and exam skills. About 200 students have taken advantage of these opportunities each year in the last three years. *Digital Tuesdays* is a series of one-hour workshops organised by the Library covering a range of digital tools to support academic skills development, such as tools for note taking, referencing, data collection, research methods, and digital archiving. Library training is also embedded within taught programmes, focusing on literature searching, referencing, and research skills.

Running through all our work at Sussex is our commitment to become 'Inclusive Sussex', with the intent that all members of our community have equal access to opportunities, and experience the University as enabling them to fully realise their potential. Foundational to this are both freedom of speech and academic freedom, and a strong commitment to diversity of background, belief, identity and thought, and to the core University values of kindness, collaboration, courage, inclusion and integrity. Our Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Unit works closely with Schools, professional services divisions, staff networks, and USSU to deliver the University's *Inclusive Sussex* (equality, diversity and inclusion) strategy, ensuring that it engages with, and addresses the needs of, both students and staff. The creation of a new senior leadership role, the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Culture, Equalities and Inclusion), who works closely with the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students) and who

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

holds executive level, pan-University responsibility for protecting and promoting freedom of speech, has further strengthened the implementation of this strategy, and signals the importance of these issues at Sussex.

The University of Sussex holds an institutional level Athena SWAN Bronze award, with seven (three Silver, four Bronze) School level Athena Swan awards. We are working towards the Race Equality Charter institutional award by 2025. We have also recently launched *Black at Sussex*, an initiative that aims to improve the experience of Black students at Sussex. Its first phase is doing this through the celebration of our Black alumni and their remarkable contributions to cultural and political life in Britain and around the world, alongside a programme of critical discussion about the experience of being a Black student at Sussex. A launch event was held in September 2022 at the Black Cultural Archives in Brixton, which was founded by Sussex alumnus, the late Len Garrison.

Both the purpose and title of the Black at Sussex programme are incredibly powerful... Showcasing the wonderful and varied legacies of these individuals enhances that sense of belonging, providing inspiring examples of what can be achieved by Black Sussex graduates.
(Valerie Kporye, BA Literature and Philosophy student)

Many factors contribute to a learning environment that enables our students to flourish. One of the most important factors is their wellbeing, and to this end we are implementing *Mentally Healthy University: the Student Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy (2022)*. This new strategy incorporates an earlier version that was aligned to the UUK's proposed Stepchange Strategy and the University Mental Health Charter, led by Student Minds. A number of aspects of this earlier version were utilised throughout the pandemic, and resulted in the OfS positively highlighting the Sussex approach to student wellbeing in its [Coronavirus Briefing Note \(OfS 2020\)](#).

The *Mentally Healthy University* strategy aims to create an optimal, psychologically safe learning and working environment for students and staff by acknowledging the symbiotic and cyclical relationship between wellbeing and the ability to fulfil one's potential. The strategy is underpinned by our institutional values of inclusion and kindness, which shape our commitment to caring for each other in our diversity.

In 2020, we embarked on an 18-month programme in which our careers and employability professionals received specialist training from the national charity Ambitious about Autism to optimise their support for autistic students, helping to guide them into sustainable employment, as detailed under SO3 below.

Most recently, we are addressing the current cost-of-living crisis in a progressive and integrated way, increasing in-person and online financial support and advice for students, doubling our student hardship fund, and providing additional financial support to (our low household income) *Sussex Bursary* students, as well as creating a new affordable housing policy in partnership with students, and introducing subsidised £2 hot vegan and vegetarian meals on campus. We also became accredited as a 'real living wage' employer, which benefits students employed by the University as, for example, *Student Connectors* and *Student Ambassadors*.

SE6. An excellent physical and virtual learning environment designed and used to support outstanding teaching and learning

The physical learning environment at Sussex includes bespoke, subject-specific and general teaching rooms and buildings, student study spaces distributed across all Schools and student-facing buildings and outdoor spaces for learning and group work across campus. The latter have become more significant since COVID-19.

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

In the period from 2017/18, we have invested £60.4 million in our campus and IT infrastructure in order to further enhance the student experience. All Schools have a budget to spend on classroom and study area improvements, and this money is typically used to refurbish or augment existing teaching and study facilities. Through our Capital Programme, we have invested in specialist teaching labs for science and technology and creative practice subjects, including computer labs, broadcast and recording studios, design, robotics, prototyping and coding facilities. Languages are taught across all our Schools and students can study over fifty world languages in the digital language suite. Our state-of-the-art Electron Microscopy Imaging Centre (EMIC) in Life Sciences was renewed in 2021, and the Bloomberg Financial Markets Lab offers access to the trading platform used by the world's leading banks, corporations and government agencies for USBS students.

ACCA was re-opened in 2015, after a £7 million refurbishment, and provides industry-standard performance, recording, exhibition, and teaching spaces for all our students, with dedicated facilities for MAH students. Taking its name from the University's former Chancellor, Richard Attenborough, ACCA's programme is guided by his values of social justice, human rights, creative education, and access to the arts for all. ACCA is an interdisciplinary arts hub, fostering student work and bringing an international community of creators to campus. As such, it connects the University with wider regional, national and international arts communities. ACCA presents a cutting-edge programme of performance, dance, live art, film, music, discussion and debate and digital practices on campus, developed with staff and students and embedded within the curriculum in many subjects. For example, Engineering students hold an annual event at ACCA to reveal the Formula Student car that they have designed and built for racing at Silverstone.

In addition to a variety of general and specialist teaching space refurbishments, our new Student Centre opened in April 2022. This was designed with strong student input and with student wellbeing as a core focus. Open 24/7, the Student Centre brings together central student support services. It provides 36 dedicated spaces for confidential appointments and drop-in sessions, informal spaces for student group work and gathering, as well as quiet study areas and flexible spaces for meetings, workshops, and events. In consideration of the diversity of student needs, there are 'heat and eat' kitchen facilities, as well as a coffee tuk-tuk, and a food ordering and delivery service. A tranquil and beautifully presented courtyard garden is available for relaxation, and the Centre's toilets are all individual gender neutral and accessible, and include showers and a changing place. During the first two weeks of the summer term of 2022, a survey of 108 students using the Student Centre revealed that participants thought the new Student Centre was a safe and comfortable space and that it felt welcoming. Overall, 98% said that it worked well for them, and 93% of participants planned to use the Centre regularly.

In addition, a further investment of £70.6 million is planned as part of our Capital Programme to fund a broad collection of projects to enhance student experience. A major new Libraries Programme will see the refurbishment of the historic Main Library, the building of a new Pavilion Library, and the enhancement of study space across campus in Schools. This programme has been co-created with students to offer choice in their learning spaces. The Pavilion Library building will be accessible to all and is designed to provide an inclusive environment for learning, with particular attention to the needs of disabled and neurodiverse undergraduate students. A major investment in our science estate (including via OfS funding) will provide new teaching laboratories and enhanced learning spaces, and the upgrade of the IT infrastructure will deliver state of the art connectivity across our campus, and universal availability of a high-speed, high- capacity IT environment for data-intensive research and teaching.

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

[The Keep](#) is an extensive archive facility in which we work in partnership with East Sussex Record Office and Brighton and Hove City Council, and which is freely shared with the wider community. Among the University's Special Collections held there are the Mass Observation Archive and the papers of Rudyard Kipling, Richard Attenborough, and Leonard and Virginia Woolf. The Keep is a distinctive and important part of our teaching environment. Students across all disciplines are taught to work with archives, increasing their confidence in using primary sources in their research and providing world-readiness and employability skills.

Our campus and its distinctive spaces are regularly used in creative ways for student projects. For example, the final-year performances of our Drama, Theatre and Performance students often make use of iconic buildings on campus. In 2021, a performance ('Murmuration') took place over the course of three days in the Library during opening hours.

Sports are an important part of our student wellbeing, belonging, and community agenda - and we open our sport facilities to the local community. In 2021/22 some 37% of our students used the sports facilities, representing 82,000 discrete visits.

Virtual provision for learning

We have used Canvas as our VLE, together with digital reading lists and lecture capture, since 2018. Although our lectures (apart from specific online delivery) are in-person again since COVID-19, they are recorded through Panopto with closed captions and uploaded shortly after the lecture onto Canvas. We monitor monthly Canvas page views: these increased from 6.8m in May 2019 to just over 9m in May 2022. Over that time period, there has been a four-fold increase in the number of discussions posted to Canvas. In May 2022, there were 2.4m minutes of Panopto video uploaded onto Canvas. Following the pandemic, we developed a set of [Digital Learning Principles](#) in order to ensure that our online and hybrid delivery was of a consistently high quality and to ensure our rapid learning about new modes of delivery became embedded into normal practice. We ensure that all modules adhere to minimum standards for online provision, and we have developed support for staff and students, toolkits with examples of best practice, and an approved Canvas template. As we moved back to in-person teaching, we developed *Guidelines for Dual Mode Teaching* to facilitate good practice for delivering online and in-person teaching synchronously. We draw on these principles and guidelines as we continue to learn from the pandemic in making best use of digital learning technologies. We award and support the development of good practice in online provision through our reflective practitioner staff network, *Dare to Transform*.

The *Digitally Enhanced Education Programme* (DEEP) is a subgroup of the Education and Students Portfolio Steering Group and is chaired by the Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Innovation). DEEP focuses on hybrid delivery outcomes in response to student feedback. Pilot studies to explore students' responses to blended learning innovations have been set up (for example in LPS), which will be evaluated at the end of the semester. This group is also in working in dialogue with USSU to develop a joint approach to hybrid learning objectives. As part of our *Student Connectors Programme*, a group of *Digital Student Connectors* has co-created projects with academics over the last three years to improve navigation of the VLE, and the current cohort is working with Schools to improve integration of virtual reality technologies into teaching.

In Life Sciences, virtual experiments recorded during the pandemic are now being used to support laboratory skills training for Chemistry and Biochemistry first-year students. Through the Canvas portal, students can watch short videos on experimental techniques that they will be using in advance of practicals to prepare for them. As their first experience of synthetic laboratory skills training, this helps make practical classes more inclusive. Similar practice walk-throughs are now also used in

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

Media Production and other technical practice courses. As a result, students are better prepared and show improved confidence in laboratory and creative environments.

The online [Skills Hub](#) is a 'one-stop shop' for academic skills support, providing videos and other resources from students and staff on a wide range of academic skills such as referencing, critical thinking, presentations and note-taking. From 2023, the *Skills Hub* also becomes a resource for staff, making available a bank of reusable learning objects that can be embedded into teaching.

SE7. Embedded student engagement to ensure continuous improvement in student experience and outcomes

Our ambition: We will embed meaningful student participation in everything that we do. Students will routinely participate as partners in the development of their learning, in the discovery of new knowledge, and in the big decisions that shape the University. Student input will help to shape the future of our physical estate and the spaces in which they learn, as well as the design of the curriculum and the appointment of academic staff. (Sussex 2025: Learn to Transform strategy).

The metrics on student voice in the NSS are not as strong as we would like them to be, but we believe that these will improve with our increased attention to mechanisms for hearing student perspectives – and acting on them. We are working on this both within every School and strategically across the University. Our updated *Student Voice* strategy was co-created by staff, USSU's officers and students in 2021/22. Its key aims are to: capture inclusive student voice; enable open discussion around learning, teaching and academic experience; capture data throughout the student journey; utilise impactful and relevant student voice mechanisms; and close the feedback loop.

There are many ways in which we seek the views of students and engage with them to improve their experience at Sussex. The University has a dedicated Student Engagement Enhancement team, including a Student Voice Manager who, alongside USSU's Student Voice Manager, work with *Student Connectors* to create an action plan to ensure that the aims of the strategy are met. Our *Student Connector Programme* has enabled students and staff to work as partners, identifying areas of work across the University, from embedding technology in learning to co-designing new modules, to increasing student engagement with Schools and professional services, and even co-designing the new Library Skills curriculum.

We have a large and active body of nearly 400 *Student Representatives* from Departments across the University. Student Representatives are coordinated by USSU, who offer training for the role. Schools also offer training and support, such as induction into the role of examination boards. The Representatives seek out the views of their fellow students and bring relevant issues to the attention of their Department, their School and the University. Student Representatives gather views through a range of methods, from informal chats to online forums, and they collate and present these at committees and in meetings with University and USSU staff. In addition, within Schools, Departments use a range of formal and less formal mechanisms to understand student perspectives. These include representation at departmental meetings, along with regular meetings between Heads of Department and student groups.

The University-level Student Experience Forum (SEF) is an advisory group that meets termly and offers Student Representatives from all Schools the opportunity to meet senior staff from the University and USSU. It has a majority student membership and is chaired by USSU. Any item relating to the student experience at University level may be discussed in SEF, including issues relating to the Student Representative Scheme itself. Senior staff who attend SEF include the Director for the Student Experience and the PVC (Education and Students).

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

USSU officers are also members of Senate and Council, and there are twice termly Executive Liaison Group Meetings between the USSU Executive Officers and the University senior leadership, with the meetings chaired alternately by the Vice-Chancellor and a USSU officer. Together with the regular involvement of students in University projects and task-and-finish groups, these mechanisms ensure that student voices are heard within the University's decision-making structures.

3. Student Outcomes

3.1. Positive outcomes

SO1. Ensuring that students succeed in and progress beyond their studies through effective, tailored approaches

Our students overall tend to achieve high standards in their studies at Sussex. The proportion of students receiving a First/ Upper Second class degree decreased by 2.7% in 2022 compared with 2021, as the effects of no-detriment policies adopted during the pandemic were discontinued. The University also saw a stabilisation in the percentage of students obtaining a First at 33%.

As part of our institutional focus on reducing awarding gaps, we have instigated a number of initiatives. A 'BAME awarding-gap toolkit' was developed for Schools from 2018/19. The awarding gap between BAME and white students achieving a First/ Upper Second degree is now closing: the gap in 2020 was 27.8% and in 2022 this went down to 19.4%. Moreover, there is now no institutional gap where disability is concerned, with students reporting as disabled achieving higher results (85% First/ Upper Second versus 79.5% for the general student population). These positive trends reflect careful work to make curricula and assessment more inclusive, for example through a range of 'decolonising the curriculum' initiatives across the Schools, often initiated and/ or supported by students.

Although specific efforts to address awarding gaps slowed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the shift to online assessments seems to have contributed significantly to reducing awarding gaps. We therefore have a policy of maintaining online examinations unless there is a compelling, pedagogic rationale for an in-person exam or a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRB) requirement.

PSRB recognition is also a marker of excellent student experience that contributes to outcomes and progression. The Business School has been accredited by EQUIS since 2019, when the BSc Business and Management degree was rated 'Above Standard'. It was also commended for its course design and the integration of sustainability and ethical business. The 2022 EQUIS Business School Accreditation Report noted that: *The students we met were very positive about the teaching, student experience and service offerings of the Business School.* Many of the undergraduate programmes in the Business School are accredited by PSRBs such as Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA), Chartered Financial Analyst Institute, Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM), Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA), the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), Chartered Institute for Securities and Investment (CISI), and Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW). Other Schools with large, accredited programmes include Psychology (British Psychological Society), Engineering and Informatics (The Chartered Institute for IT; Institution of Engineering and Technology, IET), Life Sciences (Royal Society of Chemistry, RSC), and Mathematics and Physical Sciences (Institute of Mathematics and its Applications, IMA); Institute of Physics, IOP). During a 2022 re-accreditation visit, the British Psychological Society commended the School of Psychology for offering *students a wide*

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

range of learning opportunities, supporting the development of research knowledge and skills in real-life practice.

SO2. Outstanding student continuation and completion

For some of our under-represented groups (in particular, those in the 31+ age group and ABCS Q1), we are materially above the benchmark for continuation (with <80% certainty). 83% of our students are within the benchmark range for continuation but are in splits where the benchmark is 95% or above (so there is no way to show performance 'materially above benchmark'). As noted above, our strengths in retention were recognised in the 2022 Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide, which awarded us **University of the Year for Student Retention**. The editor of the guide, Alastair McCall, said: *A supportive student environment keeps the dropout rate at Sussex at around half of its expected level, saving hundreds of student careers and millions of pounds. ...Sector-leading support for students during the pandemic also stood out in making Sussex our University of the Year for Student Retention.* (Sunday Times, 2021).

As evidenced above, our students tend to stay with us: in the latest figures the projected rate of Sussex students not completing their studies was 5.7% against a benchmark of 7.9%. We believe our low dropout rates reflect the fact that students who come to Sussex receive an excellent academic experience and strong student support.

SO3. Successful student progression

Our ambition: *In partnership with our students, we will build creative opportunities that enhance their experience, and which extend their skills, confidence, competencies and networks so that they can imagine every possible future. We will increase the opportunities for students to take placements and paid internships in government, industry and with civil society organisations, as well as to participate as volunteers, mentors and community organisers.* (Sussex 2025: Learn to Transform strategy).

Our student outcomes data demonstrate excellent results in completion and continuation, trending towards outstanding quality. However, we recognise that progression data – although moving in the right direction – are not where we would like to see them. We have addressed this head-on with our recently developed *World Readiness and Employability* strategy.

Steered by inclusivity objectives and AdvanceHE's [Framework for Embedding Employability](#), we have committed to ensuring that every student, whatever their background, develops the skills, experience and strategies needed to succeed after graduation. There are three major themes to this work: embedding workplace skills in modules, expanding the provision of placement and internship opportunities, and encouraging student entrepreneurship. This work has already led to marked increases in employment opportunities for students, provided both centrally but also increasingly locally across our Schools and courses, detailed below. Early indicators (drawn from attainment and career readiness data) suggest the *World Readiness and Employability* strategy will improve progression for our students, as outlined in SO6.

The [Sussex Career Lab programme](#) is an evolution of the University's *First Generation Scholar Internships* scheme. This is a menu of 800 opportunities across 15 activities (stepped by year group) for students to build skills, experience, and employer connections. Activities include: taster visits to employer sites, career conversations with alumni, digital accelerators, online internships with businesses outside the UK, in-person UK internships, a student-led consultancy to business, and career mentoring.

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

Since 2021/22, as part of *Career Lab*, the University has made available 500 work experience opportunities annually to students, all paid at the Real Living Wage or above. This represents a 500% rise on work experience provision since 2018/19. Whilst open to all students, under-represented groups are prioritised. Building on the success of Sussex's *Autistic Friendly University Project*, our partner Ambitious About Autism now trains some of our employer internship hosts to provide an accessible workplace for autistic students. We also encourage students to take part in the *Leonard Cheshire Change 100* scheme, a programme of paid summer work placements, professional development and mentoring that matches talented university students with any disability or long-term condition with employers. Nineteen of our disabled students secured internships through this scheme in 2022.

In terms of impact, our data indicate that students, including members of under-represented groups (which, for the purposes of employability initiatives at Sussex, are defined as Black students, disabled students, mature students and students resident in IMDQ1 postcodes), who complete *Career Lab* work experience achieve not only higher rates of career readiness than their peers, but also higher rates of academic attainment.

I gained so much knowledge on radio and the music scene in Brighton. I also now know how to work a sound desk and to produce a radio show! I also learnt professional skills and some quick research skills. This experience has made me realise I would like to work in the music industry in some way, and has made me more confident in myself professionally. (Sussex Career Lab Intern, 2022)

Our experience has been unequivocally positive. Both of our interns this year were hard working, self-starting, motivated, and had a good level of problem-solving ability. Hiring interns through this scheme has become a key part of our recruitment strategy. (Employer Host of Career Lab Interns, 2022)

[Our intern] is amazing! She is innovative, dedicated and self-motivated. She has transformed my processes and is an asset to the business. She is personable and many clients have told me to keep her! (Employer Host of Career Lab Intern, 2022)

The [Sussex Entrepreneurship Programme](#) is a comprehensive programme of activities enabling and empowering students to develop an entrepreneurial mindset and skills. At least 500 students now take part every year. Whether students wish to develop an existing business, generate a business idea, go freelance, start a social impact project, or explore turning a creative hobby into an enterprise, the programme supports them to learn, take action, and progress their project. In line with Sussex values, the opportunity to make a positive social impact through projects or businesses is threaded through this programme, and accessibility for under-represented groups is prioritised. Co-delivering the programme is an inspirational group of speakers, mentors and entrepreneurs-in-residence from under-represented groups as well as our Social Entrepreneur-in-Residence.

This was a fantastic experience and has done more for my business in one month than the last 6 months with three of us working on it! If you changed nothing, it would still be perfect. All I can say is thank you so much. (Sussex Student Entrepreneur participant, 2022)

The *Entrepreneurs in Residence* scheme began in September 2021, with the appointment of Sara Osterholzer (Impact Entrepreneur and Mentor) and Jamal Edwards MBE (British Music Entrepreneur), followed by Jeremy Jacob in March 2022. These appointments were made to further inspire a new generation of entrepreneurs emerging from the University and they play a vital role in promoting the aspirations of would-be business founders through guest talks, campus visits, one-to-ones, competition judging, and network introductions. Darren Tenkorang, recent alumnus and founder and CEO of TRIM-IT (the UK's first tech-enabled mobile barbershop franchise) is our new

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

Entrepreneur in Residence for 2022/23.

The [Sussex Connect](#) platform, now well established, gives students direct access to conversations with alumni, in a range of sectors and roles, offering careers information and mentorship. *Sussex Connect* has a total membership of more than 8,500, comprising 7,000 alumni, along with 1,400 students and current and former staff.

Sussex was also awarded **the best performing university in the UK, and in the top 10 in the world**, in supporting the global mobility of our students in the [World's Universities with Real Impact \(WURI\) 2021 Rankings](#). The University offers an outward global student mobility programme in collaboration with more than 130 universities in 35 countries worldwide, in which an average of around 350 students each year participate. Students can choose to study abroad for a year, semester or summer session, with a range of integrated, voluntary pass/fail or non-credit bearing options. Students undertaking the year abroad are encouraged towards cross-disciplinary study opportunities, with the possibility of half of their modules being taken outside their course area. In addition to in-person study abroad opportunities, several virtual summer schools are also available to students who wish to participate in global learning without physical travel. In 2021/22, 92.7% of students who undertook a year abroad achieved good outcomes (in comparison to 80.4% of the student population). Meanwhile, the number of Sussex students undertaking a professional placement year continues to grow, from 218 undergraduates in 2018/19 to 262 in 2022/23. The University's Careers and Entrepreneurship team won the [AGCAS Supporting Student and Graduate Employability Award](#) in 2021 in recognition of our expansion of placements during the pandemic.

[The Career Equity Project](#) is a close partnership with the USSU. It is a programme of events that creates a safe space for underrepresented groups to talk about hurdles they face in the job market, supported by external experts and University and USSU staff. The programme is designed with, and led by, students.

The [University of Sussex Business Mentors Scheme](#) links students with volunteer business mentors. It is designed to provide our students with professional and personal development, inspiration, and encouragement, through a supportive mentoring relationship. It aims to enable the mentee to develop their own skills and capabilities to tackle problem solving more effectively. Participating mentors advise students on improving their employability skills on a one-to-one basis to support students' career goals. Since it launched in 2019/20, there have been 25 mentors and 39 mentees in the scheme, and it has proved extremely valuable to its participants.

The Sussex Innovation Centre, which is a University of Sussex company, has, over the past 10 years, developed and delivered the *Sussex Start-Up Labs Entrepreneurship Competition*, which is mainly aimed at our undergraduates. An average of 150 students enter the programme each year, from whom 10 finalists are selected for Entrepreneurship and Social Impact Prizes. The *Sussex Innovation Centre Catalyst Programme* recruits 6-10 graduates and placement students a year on a 12-month programme, during which they receive a broad range of experience working across innovative early stage and scale-up businesses.

In 2021, our University [Sustainability Strategy](#) steered us to 'directly link all of our student careers initiatives to the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals and monitor our impact'. Social impact is now threaded through all aspects of the *Sussex Entrepreneurship Programme* and, annually, at least 35% of our 500 *Career Lab* interns and student consultants work on sustainability projects for their host organisation. In February 2022, our second annual *Pitch for the Planet* took place. This is Sussex's *Dragon's Den*-style sustainable innovation competition for students. Winners received a share of £20,000 in prizes, which they are using for start-up incubation in areas such as

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

sustainable food, reusable fashion, and environmental management. In September 2022, we awarded our first five £3,000 *Climate Leadership Scholarships* to students who have demonstrated leadership in their communities around climate change and who are committed to working both on the Sussex campus and with the wider community to tackle climate change. Two of these were awarded to undergraduate students.

To support teaching staff in developing their students' world-readiness and employability skills, the University's Careers and Entrepreneurship team has developed an *Embedding Employability Toolkit*, and each School now produces an annual *Embedding Employability Action Plan*. As a result of work in this area, curricula increasingly involve explicit attention to career development and employability, with the development of real-world learning, [authentic assessment](#) and a range of generic skills training in public speaking and writing. The Careers and Entrepreneurship team contributes to the PGCertHE course for teaching staff and, from 2022/23, outstanding performance in embedding employability in the curriculum will be recognised through a new 'World Readiness' education award.

3.2. Educational gains

SO4. Educational gains: their relevance for future ambitions

Our ambition: Our students will receive a transformative, high-quality education and learning experience that will allow them to realise the futures that they want. They will be able to embrace opportunities and challenges, make meaningful contributions in their own way. Sussex students will develop the knowledge and skills to be critical thinkers, entrepreneurs, commentators, citizens and activists... Our students will be equipped with enviable levels of digital literacy and competencies in a wide variety of leading-edge technologies, ensuring they are able to challenge and succeed in the workplace of the future and in a rapidly evolving digital society... Our students will be confident, knowledgeable and skilled, with clear career choices and real opportunities. They will be ready to be citizens of the world – connected, civically and politically engaged, entrepreneurial and creative. (Sussex 2025: Learn to Transform strategy).

Whilst we have not hitherto explicitly used the concept of 'educational gains', we are clear that we want our students to be academically successful, and to leave Sussex with a deep knowledge of their field of study, with life skills and the capabilities of active citizenship, and able to progress into fulfilling working lives. In the sections below, we set out how these ambitions are developed and manifested in several of our flagship *Learn to Transform* programmes: the *Student Connector Programme*, the *Spirit of Sussex Award*, and *Sussex Writes*.

Our *Student Connector Programme* has already been introduced above in terms of its central contribution to student voice, but it also has an important function in improving equality of opportunity for under-represented groups to succeed at and progress from Sussex. Students participating in the programme (approximately 770 students to date) achieve wide-ranging educational gains from their participation. Their student outcomes are significantly better than wider student cohorts, with 98% of graduating *Student Connectors* between 2018/19 and 2021/22 being awarded a good degree (80% of all students achieved these good outcomes over the same period). In 2021/22, 51% of our *Student Connectors* identified as being from BAME backgrounds, in comparison with the overall student population (37%). Surveys of *Student Connectors* before and after their projects have found that they gain valuable real-world experience in a supportive environment, which builds personal and professional skills and confidence in a paid role, enriching their student experience, and that they gain a valuable source of evidence and demonstration of core skills that will appeal to future employers across sectors. At the end of their Connector projects, students reported that the greatest

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

increase in their skills is in evaluating the effectiveness of a project and confidence in communication skills. In relation to personal development and life skills, the greatest gains were reported to be opportunities to work with other students from a variety of social, cultural, and ethnic backgrounds, and collaborating with others to set and achieve project objectives.

The establishment of the *Student Connector Programme* coincided with the aim to redevelop the Business School's assessment criteria to increase transparency for all students. This project comprised a team of students, academics and other staff members. By working together to create the assessment criteria, both students and staff members developed insights into each other's perspectives. The new assessment criteria were implemented in 2020-21 alongside a range of resources for staff and students. As a result, the 2021 NSS results in the Business School were improved for Q8, 'The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance', with five of the School's six subjects moving up a quartile compared to their peers and Accounting ranked in the top quartile. This was attributable to the clarity of the criteria developed through the project, to embedding them into every module's VLE site and to strong staff uptake. Following this example, other Schools have redeveloped their assessment criteria through Connector projects.

The [*Spirit of Sussex Award*](#) encourages and recognises student engagement in activities that enhance personal development, life skills, and future career prospects. Launched in 2020, this award highlights the value of co-curricular activities, such as involvement in, and leadership of, clubs and societies, volunteering, supporting the local community, and representing the student body. It particularly encourages students from under-represented groups to partake in a variety of pursuits that contribute to improved attainment and progression. The aim is to help students feel more engaged with the Sussex community, build a wider network, and reflect on their personal, and professional development. This award is now co-led with a team of *Student Connectors*. At the end of 2021/22, approximately 1000 students graduated with a *Spirit of Sussex Award*, and we are on track to surpass that figure at the end of 2022/23.

The award has seen diverse participants engaging in cultural, creative, sporting, entrepreneurial and development activities, the most outstanding of whom earn a *Special Recognition Prize*. For 2021/22 these included: a student who designed and developed face shields using a 3D printer and distributed 505 face shields across various healthcare services in Brighton and Hove during the first wave of the pandemic; a student who participated in climate justice week, acting as deputy chair for the Sustainability Committee, supported a sustainable fashion collective and won the Climate Leader prize at Sussex; and a student who volunteered for a charity that works on 'smart farm' projects in India to help resolve the problems faced by small farming communities.

Approximately 44% of current award participants identify as BAME and 24.5% of current award participants are disabled. In the non-UK domiciled student population with a disability, 93% of awardees obtained a good degree, which is 17 percentage points higher than non-awardee students in that category. 97.2% of UK domiciled 2021 award participants attained a good degree (compared with 90.6% in the wider Sussex population), and 94.7% of non-UK award participants attained a good degree (compared with 69% of their non-UK peers). Engagement with the award enables students to make new connections and showcase their talents to future employers. Taking part in the rich process of professional and personal development and the self-reflection facilitated by the award, alongside academic study, ensures that these skills can be applied and embedded in students' learning, providing an enhanced educational experience.

Our English Department established [*Sussex Writes*](#) in 2016. This is a transformative creative writing programme that helps young people across the University and beyond to become more creative and

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

confident. Undergraduates from a range of Schools and courses are supported to run creative writing and literacy workshops in 25 schools across East and West Sussex, and to create podcasts and write blogs about this activity. Seventy Sussex undergraduate students who have participated in the programme have also worked with young people in 22 countries in the Global South on shared online creative writing activities. *Sussex Writes* enables students to apply degree knowledge and skills in new and professional contexts. It invites teamwork between students on different degree programmes and in different years of study, and it is centred on core Sussex activities and commitments: community engagement, social justice, and widening participation. In a recent survey of the current cohort of 23 participants, 79% agreed that working on *Sussex Writes* improved their communication skills significantly, 91% believed that working for the programme had helped with their planning and organisation skills, and 93% agreed that *Sussex Writes* had helped them to improve their teamwork skills.

SO5. Evidence-based, effective and tailored support to achieve educational gains

Complementing our institution-wide strategy, each of our Schools also embeds support to achieve educational gains in ways that are tailored to the specific needs and aspirations of their students. This is both through practice-based experience as part of learning throughout their degree and through links with employers. As part of core provision, all students can also access 1:1 guidance from a careers consultant aligned to their academic School.

For example, all first-year students in the School of Engineering and Informatics undertake a global design challenge. Students work in interdisciplinary teams to develop design solutions from real-world, sustainable development briefs provided by the [Engineers without Borders \(EwB\) Challenge](#). This is a pass/fail module and assessment is based on a team presentation as well as individual engagement with the workshops. It serves to build cohort community at the start of undergraduate studies at Sussex, and supports the transition to university. Second-year Product Design students then work in groups to complete a design commission from a client who provides a commercial brief. As well as applying technical skills, the module requires research, prototyping, client engagement and user-centric orientation, commercial acumen, and written and oral communication. Assessment is through coursework. A panel of judges, including industry experts, assess submissions. In their final year, students on our Product Design degree apply their accumulated knowledge and design skills to a more substantial project of their own choice. This culminates in an exhibition at the annual Product Design degree show, where students are exposed to trade professionals, potential employers, and the media.

In a similar vein, final-year Life Sciences students on the *Conservation in Practice* module engage with employers in the conservation sector, and visit up to four local conservation projects, with assessment for the module taking the form of a mock grant application for a student-designed conservation research project.

Our Humanities and Social Science Schools also provide effective and tailored support for students to achieve a wide range of disciplinary, employability and life skills. For example, during the *Clinical Legal Education* module, final-year law students work with solicitors and legal practitioners to provide pro bono legal advice to members of the community, assist in the county courts and in local charities. Students submit reflective journal entries after their client meetings and are assessed through submission of a portfolio. In our School of Education and Social Work, the module *Discovering Role Models* trains second-year students to create and facilitate workshops on mental health and wellbeing for young people in a local secondary school. The *Professional Practice* module for Media and Film students is organised around a placement in the creative sector. Students develop and reflect upon their work place skills, the demands of time management, and technical, organisational

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

and/or creative achievement, as appropriate. Lastly, in our School of Global Studies, a recent audit of employability in the curriculum showed how opportunities to apply learning are embedded throughout students' time with us. In addition, all undergraduates in the School have access to *Global Citizens Bursaries* that facilitate their ability to undertake placements as part of their degrees.

In the Business School, simulations enable experiential learning in a context that is calibrated to reflect their stage of learning and which enables students to experiment, make mistakes, and learn from them. A Business School academic has worked closely with simulation provider Edumondo to build students' skills, including accountability, decision-making and versatility, thereby developing confidence in applying knowledge to business scenarios. The Business School also uses live employer challenges as part of the curriculum. Academics select a suitable brief on the Riipen experiential learning platform and work directly with their partner organisation. The briefs are then integrated into module activity. An academic in the Department of Economics was awarded one of the School's innovative curriculum seedcorn grants to pilot the use of the Riipen platform within their undergraduate module in autumn 2020/21. As a result of this pilot, other academics are now using the platform to embed real world learning into the curriculum.

We recognise that there are areas where outcome data on progression are weaker (Biosciences, Chemistry, Mathematics and Medical Science) and we are taking steps to address this. For example, in their third-year, Chemistry students have the option to choose *Introduction to Drug Design*. This module incorporates lectures by external speakers from industry to talk about their specific experience of drug discovery. In Maths, a compulsory module in year two is designed to support students' employability pathways through the development of career management skills.

SO6. Mechanisms for evaluating educational gains and measuring success

Our *Career Readiness Survey* is a tool that allows students to assess their own stage of career readiness at different points in their student journey, and also provides the mechanism for us to measure the impact of the interventions we have introduced through our strategic work. Over 90% of Sussex students complete this survey at point of enrolment, updating their answers when they re-enrol. The survey enables us to direct personalised support to individual students.

Data show that those completing a placement year achieve graduate outcomes at significantly higher rates than their peers – findings that underpin the rationale for further placement expansion. Sussex *First Generation Scholars* (bursary recipients) who completed a placement year in 2016/17 and 2017/18 achieved on average an 87.5% graduate employment rate in the Graduate Outcomes Survey (17% higher than the general Sussex population). There are also strong correlations between international mobility experiences at Sussex, degree outcomes and graduate salaries (as measured through LEO and HESA). For example, American Studies undergraduate students who took an integrated year abroad have higher median salaries five years after graduation and match the sector benchmarks for employment at 15 months.

In 2021/22 re-enrolment, 21% of final year UK-domiciled undergraduates who had completed *Career Lab* had a job or further study plan confirmed, compared to 13% in our overall population (rising from 3% the previous year). The greater likelihood of having employment or study confirmed amongst the students who participate in *Career Lab* is an indicator of the success of the scheme, which will feed into future Graduate Outcomes Survey results. In 2022/23 re-enrolment, Career Readiness data also showed us that students completing the new *Sussex Entrepreneurship Programme* or a year-long placement are twice as likely as peers to be in the final two stages of career readiness by the start of their final year.

Provider name: University of Sussex
UKPRN: 10007806

As part of our support for career readiness, from 2022/23 all students receive personalised calls-to-action based on their career readiness stage at (re)enrolment. These calls-to-action engage students with the most relevant digital resources for their current stage of career planning – including information about more than 500 job vacancies, 24-hour CV feedback, sector guides, and the *Sussex Connect* alumni networking platform. Students can then further explore their career options and connect to employers via around 100 annual recruiter and alumni events and training workshops organised by the Careers and Entrepreneurship team. For example, the annual Sussex and Brighton Careers Fair is the largest on the south coast, enabling students to meet a wide range of recruiters. A total of 2,084 Sussex students and 100 employers attended the 2022 Careers Fair this autumn in the Amex Stadium.

All of this translates into increasingly positive career outcomes, including with respect to diverse student groups. For example, Graduate Outcomes Survey 2019/20 results show much reduced graduate outcomes gaps for Black students and mature students, and for our disabled students.

We also track outcomes through on-going contact with our alumni. Achievements of alumni are profiled for current and future students in our [‘spotlight’](#) pages, and we end this submission with the words of some of our recent graduates:

(BSc Genetics) of The Gen Z Club and founder and director of Born To Stand Out fashion brand. was winner of Start-up Sussex One to Watch Award says: *During my time at Sussex I did a foundation year in bio sciences and 3 years in genetics. My experience at Sussex was a very pleasurable one and one I will be grateful for forever. I enjoyed my course and liked the variety of modules. I was actively involved in extra-curricular activities and entrepreneurship programs such as Start-up Sussex and the accelerator. These were of great help to me in developing my character and getting where I am now.*

graduated with a degree in Drama: Theatre and Performance and since then has continued to act and appear in films. While studying at Sussex, Corinne performed across the country as part of the Sussex Dance society and volunteered at First Base Day Centre, a day centre for people who are homeless or vulnerably housed in Brighton. says: *I think acting is a lot about your life experiences as well as the art and Sussex helped me grow and mature, learn to become independent, and to push through when I felt like giving up. My tutors ... were an absolute inspiration and helped me gain confidence in myself and my art.*

graduated with a BSc in Geography and is now at River Island. She says: *My degree, including my research undertaken as part of the completion of my dissertation on fashion and sustainability, as well as the significant supply chain experience I gained through work experience whilst being a student at Sussex, have given me the ability to work to a high standard to make a change in the lives of factory workers in England and abroad. Today, thanks to these, I assist in supply chain assessment, ethical risk management, and issue resolution, making meaningful differences in factory workers' lives.*

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