

TEF 2023 provider submission: The University of Reading

1. Provider context

The University of Reading: Community, Excellence and Environment

The University of Reading's purpose is to act together, using our collective skills and diversity, to deliver a better world through the transformational power of quality education and research.

This involves an holistic approach to nurturing and developing our students based on three core values: providing an inclusive campus **community** that puts people first; aspiring to the highest standards of educational **excellence** in terms of experience and outcomes; and protecting and making best use of our **environment**. These values flow directly from the University's Strategic Plan 2020-2026 and are recurring themes throughout this submission. By working with a focus on the whole student, in the current TEF assessment period we have transformed student experience and strengthened already excellent student outcomes.

Our culturally diverse academic community comprises 19,750 students and 3,960 members of staff in the UK (2020/21). We offer a breadth of academic disciplines, with our 2020/21 full-time undergraduate population split across 28 out of the 34 subject areas for the TEF. Teaching and learning are organised around academic School units, based on disciplines. While the strategies outlined are centrally driven and supported, local delivery means they can be adapted to the needs of different disciplines, their students and their signature pedagogies. This submission will illustrate our excellence across this breadth of provision.

References to TEF metrics throughout this submission are based on full-time, UK-based undergraduate students unless stated otherwise. UK-based undergraduates represent two-thirds of our student population, with over 96% of these studying full time. The numbers of full-time undergraduate students that are either not local or under 21 years of age on entry are proportionately much higher than the sector. In 2020/21, for example, 93.8% of our students weren't local prior to entry, compared to the sector average of 75.7%, and 92.4% were under 21 years old, compared to the sector average of 76.6%. This requires a strong focus on supporting the transition to university and a new home, with high levels of tailored support [SO1, 2, 3].

We consistently have very high-quality Student Outcomes (Full-time Continuation, Completion and Progression measures at benchmark, and Part-time Continuation and Completion measures materially above benchmark). We also have very high-quality indicators across the majority of our Student Experience measures.

The data show that over 76% (404 out of 527) of our split indicators with reportable data across full-time, part-time and degree apprenticeship modes of study are at least broadly in line with benchmark. This includes all the student characteristic split indicators for Continuation, Completion, Progression, Academic support and Student voice.

We have a well-embedded culture of collaborative development with students actively involved in shaping their educational experience [SE7]; this includes working in partnership on this submission. Reading University Students' Union (RUSU) is submitting a Student Submission on behalf of our student community. It is an independent submission, but we have worked together, by sharing information, expertise, emerging themes and data.

2. Student experience

SE1

An overarching Curriculum Framework

Over this TEF assessment period, we have transformed our student experience metrics. In year 1, four out of the five measures of student experience were materially below benchmark, with the other, Teaching on my course, broadly in line. By year 4, all five measures were at least in line with benchmark, with Student voice materially above. This turnaround is the result of a strategically targeted and carefully implemented review of undergraduate programmes between 2016 and 2019, underpinned by an institution-wide Curriculum Framework [Fig. 1].

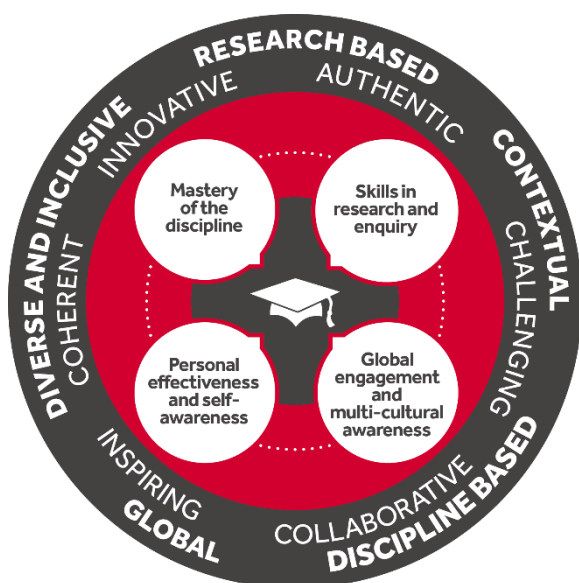


Fig 1. The Curriculum Framework: outlines a set of programme principles which underpin the curriculum and engender the range of attributes expected for University of Reading graduates. These principles are used by programme teams in the design, delivery and enhancement of new and existing programmes and modules

The Framework promotes effective and impactful pedagogic practice.¹ It sets the expectation that programmes are designed in partnership with students, informed by up-to-date research and scholarship, progressively challenging and inspiring, grounded in disciplinary pedagogies, and inclusive of our varied student community. It has encouraged innovations that engage and inspire our students, and which progressively challenge them to achieve their potential. Sections SE2, 3 and 6 provide more detailed examples of this work.

The implementation of the Framework was a major undertaking that involved institutional investment equivalent to £1 million. Academic developers and project officers were seconded to provide bespoke support to academic Schools and departments. They facilitated partnership workshops between colleagues and students and approached curriculum enhancement through a lens that aligned with disciplinary identity and pedagogies.

This work was reinforced by the development of

seven comprehensive online toolkits. A further £120,000 was allocated to develop resources for programmes to become more inclusive of disadvantaged and under-represented groups.

Improving Assessment and feedback

A central focus of our curriculum review has been to improve students' experience of Assessment and feedback. The Curriculum Framework clearly sets out our expectation that assessment is inclusive, authentic, varied and proportionate. There have been three prongs to this work: our Electronic Management of Assessment (EMA) programme; the 'Focus on Feedback' campaign; and improved assessment briefs and rubrics. The impact of these institutional initiatives can be seen in our NSS scores for Assessment and feedback, with a reduction in the gap between our indicator and benchmark moving from -3.6 percentage points (pp) in 2019 to -0.4pp in 2022. While we recognise that progress in this area has not been uniform across all subject disciplines, the institutional direction of travel is clear. Areas which remain materially below benchmark are the subject of specific projects developed in collaboration with our students [SE7].

The first stage of our strategy involved a major initiative to modernise our processes for setting, submitting and marking student assignments. The EMA programme [SE6] has improved multiple aspects of the student experience including: a simplified submission process with all written assignments uploaded electronically; improved access to assessment criteria through enhanced use of marking rubrics; greater clarity in the provision of feedback through online marking; and improved timeliness of feedback with the implementation of a 15-day turnaround policy.² The impact of the EMA Programme has been recognised externally, with a Blackboard Catalyst Award for Optimising the Student Experience (June 2019) as well as being shortlisted for the E-assessment Awards 'Best Transformational Project' (April 2019). Our Student Information System team won the coveted Tribal award for Outstanding Student Learning Experience (July 2019), in recognition of the innovative technical changes made to support the EMA programme.

The second prong has been our 'Focus on Feedback' campaign. This has comprised the publication of a user-friendly Feedback Guide for academic staff (our 7 Cs of Quality Feedback)³, support for colleagues leading on Assessment and feedback in Schools, a review of our Feedback Policy, and a programme of staff development events including high-profile external speakers. The campaign has been informed throughout by the findings from student panels, and used to develop bespoke 'best practice' workshops for subject areas materially below benchmark. Work to improve student engagement with feedback has been supported by RUSU, including a set of resources to help students get the most from comments and advice.

Improving the clarity and usefulness of the assessment briefs and marking rubrics that students receive has been the third prong. In keeping with the principles of our Curriculum Framework, this work has been conducted at programme level and grounded in disciplinary pedagogies. Notable examples include a project in our Institute of Education exploring student understanding of key phrases commonly used in feedback and a student-led process in the School of Biological Sciences to create more user-friendly rubrics (both subjects – Education and teaching and Biosciences – sit materially above benchmark for Assessment and feedback). These initiatives have been widely disseminated across the University via our Communities of Practice and our teaching and learning development programme [S4]. Similar initiatives underpin positive Assessment and feedback indicators in Pharmacology, toxicology and pharmacy (+8.5pp), Mathematical sciences (+5.8pp), Languages and area studies (+4.2pp) and History and archaeology (+2.7pp).

Excellence across a diverse range of provision

The quality of student experience and outcomes is evident across the full breadth of our provision. For example, we have a small but very successful partnership with local Further Education colleges to teach our Foundation Degree in Children's Development and Learning (1.1% of our full-time undergraduate population in 2020/21) in which there is a strong emphasis on student support involving workplace mentors and College Link Tutors as well as University Academic Tutors. All indicators for this provision are materially above benchmark apart from Learning resources, which is broadly in line. Academic support is 8.5pp above benchmark and Completion rates are 11.4pp above, evidencing the outstanding quality of the student experience and student outcomes.

Apprenticeship programmes are a small but growing mode of provision (2% of our Undergraduate student body). Students come to us with a clear expectation that what they learn will be directly relevant to the workplace. This shapes the design of our teaching and assessment with a clear work-based learning focus. Pedagogy is student-centred. Action-based learning sets provide the

means by which students critically engage with learning materials. Assessment is authentic, based on real problems and challenges that students are facing in their working lives. Student support is underpinned by a system of Apprenticeship Tutors who tie together the three-way relationship between provider, learner and employer. Apprenticeship Tutors offer academic guidance, supplement feedback to students and help them manage the competing demands of work and study. The success of this system is reflected in metrics for Assessment and feedback (5.4pp above benchmark) and student Continuation (+3.2pp), as much as for Academic support (+1.5pp).

SE2

Authentic and engaging course content and delivery

That our students remain engaged and committed to their studies is evidenced by our Continuation and Completion indicators, which are consistently in line with or materially above benchmark for all student groups based on disability, ethnicity, sex and socio-economic background. These outcomes reflect a carefully planned approach to programme design, grounded in our Curriculum Framework. We stretch our students to achieve academic excellence by supporting and nurturing their personal development and broader cultural awareness. This means taking a programme-level approach to learning design, ensuring that our students encounter progressively more challenging content and assessment, and that appropriate scaffolding is in place to support achievement of learning objectives. Where appropriate, programmes are also designed to allow for progressively more student choice and specialisation. This provides students with greater autonomy over their learning and allows for the most academically challenging assessments to be aligned with topics or issues that are of most interest or relevance to them. By setting challenging objectives and then supporting our students to work progressively toward them, we develop confidence, resilience and wellbeing alongside academic and professional skills.

The centrality of 'mastery of the discipline' within the Curriculum Framework reflects not just the importance of academic rigour but the subject-specific context within which this is developed and tested. Our diverse disciplinary mix means we offer a rich variety of practical and engaging learning experiences and equip our graduates to address a range of real-world challenges. Our students benefit from an exceptional environment, with a range of specialist facilities, resources and software, and their reviews place us #1 in the UK for campus and facilities by StudentCrowd. Our facilities include commercially active farms, a purpose-built clinic for speech and language therapy, an atmospheric observatory, three campus-based museums, a botanical garden, unique archives and special collections (including one of the UK's largest collections of plant species) and the most extensive non-investment bank financial dealing room facilities in the world. These, along with our laboratories, performance spaces, studio facilities, print workshops and virtual reality environments enable an authentic hands-on approach to learning. This is evident not just in student projects, exhibitions or performances, but also in realistic simulation exercises relating to a multitude of areas, such as irrigation methods, legal cases and financial trading.

Our programmes also allow for engaging and immersive real-world learning experiences. The extensive parkland campus provides an ideal location for fieldwork in subjects from geography and surveying to wildlife conservation and plant science. Beyond the campus, student learning is enhanced through fieldwork, archaeological digs, site surveys and study visits. During the Covid-19 pandemic, many of these experiences were transferred online, with our virtual field trip in geography being shortlisted for a THE Award in 2021.

Students apply and develop their learning through a variety of means. The Tate Exchange initiative allows students from the School of Arts and Communication Design to take over the 5th floor of the Blavatnik Building at Tate Modern for a week. Programmes in pharmacy, psychology, education and accounting are designed around immersive work-based placements, while smaller placement opportunities are integrated into key modules in subjects such as history, English literature and classics. Around 300 students undertake a year-long industry placement each year as part of their undergraduate degree. The impact work placements have on students' experience can be seen in the responses to optional NSS questions. In 2022, those agreeing that placements had been valuable in helping their learning (B5.3), helping develop skills in relation to their course (B5.4) and helping develop general life skills (B5.5) was over 89% in each case.

Evidencing active engagement

Our internal module evaluation surveys provide the strongest evidence of how our students respond to the opportunities and experiences we provide. Over the last three years we have collected over 51,000 survey responses from undergraduate students. The aggregate trends in the data correspond closely with published NSS results for areas such as teaching quality, organisation and management, and assessment and feedback. These data also provide the most robust evidence we have into the academic experience of our students as they progress through their programmes of study. In tracking the average scores for students who were in Part 1 in 2019/20, Part 2 in 2020/21 and Part 3 in 2021/22 we see the percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing that "Staff have made the subject interesting" increased year on year (71.6% in 2019/20, 76.0% in 2020/21, 82.6% in 2021/22). We saw a similar pattern for "I gave my best possible effort to learning in this module" (81.3% in 2019/20, 87.6% in 2020/21, 89.7% in 2021/22) and "In this module I gained confidence in tackling unfamiliar problems" (65.0% in 2019/20, 75.0% in 2020/21, 82.8% in 2021/22). It is striking that, even for students on whom the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic was most pronounced in years 2 and 3 of their programmes, reported levels of interest and engagement increased throughout their studies.

Here we see evidence of a structured approach that progressively supports and inspires students as they move from the core foundational content typically covered in Part 1 to the more specialist optional choices (or capstone modules) later in their programmes. These results also point to where we should focus our efforts if we are to further enhance our students' experience of learning, and to support undergraduate students feel more fully engaged and enthused before the final year of their programmes. As a result, one theme of our current institution-wide programme of portfolio review for all levels of study is the further embedding of authentic modes of assessment that engage students more consistently throughout the duration of their programmes.

SE3

Outstanding research-enhanced teaching and scholarship

Our programmes are designed to equip graduates with the skills and experiences not just to understand and apply new knowledge, but to play a part in creating and developing it. This has been an institutional priority since the work of our HEFCE-funded Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning in Applied Undergraduate Research Skills 2005-10. It was a central tenet of our Teaching and Learning Strategy 2013-2018, and subsequently of our Curriculum Framework where skills in research and enquiry form one of our core graduate attributes.

We make this aspiration a reality through the creation of genuinely research-based curricula grounded in our research-rich environment. The REF 2021 confirmed the University of Reading's

place as a leading research-intensive university – 98% of our research is internationally recognised and we are ranked 35th out of 157 institutions in the UK by research power. Whether learning about wildlife conservation or cryptocurrencies, the impacts of climate change or political populism, students are typically taught by active researchers. This keeps teaching current and inspiring, with students telling us that their ‘learning has benefited from modules that are informed by current research’ [NSS 2022: B7.4 79.3%].

Students engage in current debates within their discipline and are equipped to progressively develop their research skills and pursue their own investigations, including through synoptic projects and/or dissertations. They are provided with opportunities to develop and disseminate their research in authentic ways – from participation in archaeological excavations to publication of creative writing anthologies, from the design and development of new food products to the presentation of public history.

The University is home to an enviable range of special collections and actively embeds these rich archival and material resources within a broad range of programmes involving academic Schools across the University, covering both arts and sciences. Based on the principles of enquiry-based learning, students are encouraged to engage creatively with these unique collections in ways that develop their professional talents as well as their skills of research and enquiry. Recent projects have exposed students to the complexity of contemporary work in arts, heritage and community engagement, while enabling them to hone their project management skills. These range from co-developing theatrical performances with community partners, to co-curating an exhibition on soil with students from a pupil referral unit. Our leadership of Museum Partnership Reading (an Arts Council England-funded National Portfolio Organisation), has enabled us to partner with over 60 local community organisations. The breadth and depth of the University’s collections create an environment that enriches student learning right across our portfolio and supports cross-disciplinary themes such as Education for Sustainable Development. That our work in this area is sector-leading is evidenced by the nomination of the programme leader for the THE Most Innovative Teacher of the Year Award in 2021.

Embedding professional practice and employer engagement in student experience

Professional practice is integrated into the student learning experience at multiple levels. Many of our academics bring a wealth of professional experience that enriches their teaching, either from previous careers or from ongoing roles as advisors or consultants to government, industry or professional bodies. Guest lectures (often by alumni) are a common feature of teaching practice across all subjects. We partner with relevant professional bodies and organisations to provide students with real-world projects. Examples include Live Projects (Construction Management and Architecture), the New Product Development module (Food and Nutritional Science), the Applied Entrepreneurship module (Henley Business School) and Model United Nations (Politics). The module Forecasting Floods (Geography and Environmental Science) was co-developed with several partners: the Environment Agency, the Met Office, the Scottish Flood Forecasting Services and the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts.

Learning is embedded within the technologies that underpin contemporary professional practice. These range from Building Information Modelling (Construction Management), to Brain Computer Interfaces (Biomedical Engineering) and Geographic Information Systems (Archaeology). As well as developing professional knowledge and skills in the classroom, lab or in the field, students can also put these into practice. ‘Real Jobs’ (Typography and Graphic Communication) is a well-

established scheme that enables students to take on design briefs from commercial clients, seeing projects through from start to finish. These are real world projects that provide valuable industry experience while also contributing to students' end of year degree exhibitions. Our students confirm that 'my institution offered activities and resources designed to prepare me for the next step in my career' [NSS 2022: B15.2 78.6%].

Deep industry connections underpin our learning environment in many ways. Our teaching and research in finance, for example, is embedded within the International Capital Markets Association (ICMA), a professional body with over 620 members in 65 countries. Degrees in Accounting and Business (PwC) and Physician Associate (NHS) have been developed in conjunction with specific employers. Our longstanding partnership with the Reading Real Estate Foundation seeks to diversify talent in that sector through the pioneering 'Pathways to Property' scheme. Our apprenticeship provision further deepens our relationships with strategically important employers. Most of our academic Schools run at least one undergraduate programme that is overseen by a Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB), and for six of our Schools the full breadth of their UG portfolio is professionally accredited. Of our full-time undergraduate students in 2020/21, 61% were studying on a course accredited by a PSRB. The 34 different PSRBs that accredit our programmes, through quality assurance activities and wider engagement, help to ensure that our educational design and delivery reflects contemporary professional practice. External examiners have praised our programmes for the depth of professional engagement, and have commented on our strong reputation within relevant industry sectors for producing 'job-ready' graduates. In areas with a less direct link to specific careers, our external examiners have commended programmes for developing professional and transferrable skills.⁴ This is displayed in our student progression data, which are either broadly in line with or materially above benchmark for all sub-groups of students based on age, sex, ethnicity, domicile or socio-economic background (SO3).

SE4

Nurturing, celebrating and rewarding excellent academic practice

Based in our ethos of community, we have a strong, well-embedded institutional culture that nurtures, celebrates and rewards excellent academic practice at every career stage in multiple ways, ensuring our students learn from highly skilled, inspiring teachers. Our highly valued and competitive University Teaching Fellowship Scheme (UTF) raises aspirations and ambition among our teaching community. We currently have 53 UTFs and have had 20 National Teaching Fellows in the last 15 years, seven since 2018.

Key to this sustained success is our extensive network of institutional and local communities. These bring together colleagues in key teaching and learning roles to uphold and reinforce excellence and allow creativity and innovation to thrive. By meeting on a regular basis, colleagues can share opportunities and develop best practice in an encouraging, supportive environment. Communities of Practice (CoP) include School & Department Directors of Teaching and Learning, Programme Directors (UG and PG), Directors of Academic Tutoring, Student Engagement leads, Education Research advocates, Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) champions and International Tutors.

We have a long-standing commitment to supporting pedagogic development at a local level, which is borne out through our teaching and learning award schemes. We support innovation through a dedicated Teaching and Learning Development Fund (£250,000 a year).⁵ T&L Enhancement Projects, Student Partnerships in T&L (PLanT) and T&L Initiatives funds offer annual ring-fenced

resource for small-scale, strategically aligned T&L projects with the potential for significant impact on students' experience. This impact can be transformational, as in the case of Generating Resources and Access to Screen-capture Software (GRASS), which supported a cross-disciplinary team to develop the potential of screen capture technology in 2013 and ultimately provided the basis for our institutional Learning Capture project [SE 6].

Our teaching and learning development programme offers a range of opportunities to all staff who are involved in teaching and student support. The programme of workshops aligns to the principles of the Curriculum Framework, and is supplemented with informal, colleague-led showcases, facilitating the sharing of practice across disciplines. We run annual T&L Conferences and Festivals, frequently drawing on external experts to stimulate debate and reinvigorate our thinking. Our Academic Development and TEL teams provide bespoke support for Schools that is responsive to disciplinary priorities and adapted to their context. This central team of pedagogic and digital experts is resilient and flexible, ensuring the changing needs of our university community can be met in an agile way. This was critical during the pandemic, which required support for the rapid pivot to online teaching through the development of high-quality staff guidance and training at speed.

Our Advance HE-accredited FLAIR Framework comprises both taught (Academic Practice Programme) and non-taught (CPD scheme) routes to Fellowship, enabling us to enhance and develop teaching and learning through supported reflection on practice. It enables both academic and professional support staff involved in teaching to gain professional recognition for their work. Since the inception of the FLAIR Framework in 2013, we have awarded 425 fellowships through the CPD scheme, 25% of which have been to professional services colleagues. We also have an embedded pathway to Associate Fellow for doctoral researchers, and have awarded 55 over this TEF period, thereby supporting reflection on and improvement of early teaching experiences.⁶

The annual RUSU-led Excellence Awards give students the opportunity to acknowledge staff who have gone above and beyond expectations to improve delivery of the learning experience and demonstrated excellent and innovative teaching practice. Between 2018 and 2022, over 1,000 nominations were received for teaching and support staff.⁷ Nomination cases are shared with staff nominees, regardless of whether they ultimately win, to show that students appreciate and recognise their efforts in enriching their learning experience. Nominated staff reported that this student feedback is motivating and rewarding, and that it was satisfying to hear that they were meeting their aims. Nominations and awards are highly valued evidence towards T&L promotion.

Career development

Teaching is a highly valued career pathway at the University of Reading, and acknowledging high-quality teaching in career development is an important means of fostering excellence. The majority of academic staff are on a teaching and research or teaching pathway and we have teaching-focused colleagues at all career levels. Together with our teaching and learning leadership, they lead strategic projects, share excellent practice and support the career development of peers.

Our advancement policies and procedures reflect and promote a culture where teaching excellence is central. We have embedded the Professional Standards Framework (PSF) in all our HR practices so that teaching excellence is now well embedded across the academic lifecycle. All teaching staff must have HEA Fellowship, or an equivalent qualification, as a minimum to pass probation and to be promoted to Associate Professor or Professor. Currently, 75.7% of our staff on

a Teaching Intensive (TI) or Teaching and Research (T&R) contract (of 0.2FTE or above) have a teaching qualification.

In 2016, we introduced more explicit evidence-based T&L and Citizenship criteria and a new process for academic promotion to Associate Professor and Professor. This is now well embedded, offering parity of esteem and opportunity across teaching and research. To progress, all colleagues must provide evidence of a valued contribution to T&L and a track record of excellent teaching practice that has positively impacted on student experience and outcomes.

Critically, we do not undermine the institutional worth of teaching through casualisation. We only use hourly paid lecturing staff in limited circumstances such as to cover for short-term absence. Associate Lecturers are employed on the framework grades and using a consistent structure that ensures parity of contractual arrangements.

SE5

Timely and targeted student support

Since 2019, we have seen consistent year-on-year improvement in the position of our indicator relative to benchmark for Academic support, from -2.5pp in 2019 to +2.0pp in 2022. Our split indicators now show scores in line with benchmark standards among all parts of our student community, whether defined by age, ethnicity, sex, disability or socio-economic background. This improvement has been underpinned by a programme of change based on a series of closely integrated projects designed to support students holistically through their university life and to identify – and fast-track targeted help towards – those facing particular barriers to learning. In keeping with our Curriculum Framework, this work is designed to serve our diverse student community and is informed by our Vision for Inclusive Practice in T&L.⁸

Our investment in pre-arrival support systems includes a bespoke web portal that provides insights into student life at Reading. Within this, Study Smart is a short interactive online course based on the real experience of our students and colleagues – including those from underrepresented groups. It focuses on three main areas: academic integrity; communicating at university; and independent learning. It bridges learning from previous contexts, providing insights into what will be expected at Reading, so students can begin their studies with confidence. Study Smart is typically completed by 60% of new students,⁹ with 67% of those reporting that it was helpful in preparing them for University.¹⁰

Our Student Transitions into Reading or STaR mentoring programme matches **all** new students (approximately 5,500) with a current student from their subject area. It fosters connections between students and staff in their disciplines and bolsters the well-structured and holistic transition support package throughout the course of Welcome Week and into term one. 95% of our survey responders have told us that this package helped them to feel part of the University.¹⁰

In 2021 we renewed our approach to student transitions in light of the particular challenges posed by Covid-19. Among the outputs of this work was a new diagnostic tool for students and an extensive student transitions toolkit drawing together a range of guidance and resources for staff.¹¹

Tutoring, study advice and specialist support

Support for students throughout the duration of their programmes has been greatly enhanced by our Academic Tutor System, re-launched in 2018 with new training and role descriptors and improved leadership within Schools.¹² Simultaneously, to complement the academic support

provided by Tutors, a new Student Welfare Team (a manager and six Student Welfare Officers) was created offering pastoral support to students for issues affecting their wellbeing. This has been a vital layer of support during the pandemic. The team is embedded within our student support services and exists as a referral option for staff within Schools and as a drop-in service for students, distinct from our therapeutic Counselling and Wellbeing team. Strong links between Schools and their designated Welfare Officers have led to effective interventions on both sides. In 2018-19, the team engaged with 899 students, increasing to 1,042 in 2019-20, with over 50% of these self-referring via the drop-in service.

This increased welfare provision allows Academic Tutors to focus on their areas of expertise, helping students to achieve academic success and developing the essential graduate attributes for employment or further study. They support tutees academically and professionally through proactive relationships and structured academic conversations informed by student data in areas such as academic support and study skills, assessment and feedback, and careers and employability. They are well supported by our Academic Tutor Toolkit, training and guidance materials.

Crucially, tutors can now draw on a suite of student attendance, engagement and attainment management tools that provide academic (and other) colleagues with near to real-time data so they can tailor support and pro-actively engage students who can most benefit. Attendance and engagement reports (which can be generated by individual student, tutor group or cohort) bring together data on in-person attendance, online attendance and coursework submissions. This forms the basis of regular subject-based monitoring that is followed up under the University's Academic Engagement and Fitness to Study Process. In 2021/22, over 700 recorded formal interventions were carried out with over 400 individual undergraduate students. Early identification means that tailored support plans can be put in place and overseen by School Directors of Academic Tutoring (SDATs). At the end of 2021/22, 50% of these students had – despite early worrying levels of engagement – successfully achieved a positive outcome, and a further 21% have been facilitated to either take a temporary break from study to return in a year or have extensions on outstanding coursework. Through this dedicated work we have been able to support 71% of students with the weakest engagement records to successfully continue with their studies.¹³

In addition to Academic Tutors, academic support is embedded into our programmes and provided to students by the staff who teach them. Students are also supported by a team of academic liaison librarians (there is one for every subject taught at Reading) through one-to-one appointments, workshops and embedded teaching sessions. Students can access our Study Advice team in our Library where they have a dedicated enquiry desk and consultation rooms. They also have access to a range of skills development resources, including on-line maths support, video guides, webinars and individual advice sessions. Peer support is available within disciplines via our departmental Academic Skills and Know-how Advisers. These ASK Advisors are postgraduate research students, trained by the Study Advice team, whose advice is based on their knowledge and experience of the discipline and the department.

We offer comprehensive support for students with registered disabilities (19.6% of our full-time undergraduate students in 2020/21, compared with 16.8% sector-wide). They are supported by 125 social and academic mentors, notetakers and lab assistants. Eligible students receive bespoke mentoring, tailored to the individual and their needs, to help them plan and organise their work and improve their study skills. Many students report that their mentor was essential in their progression

at the University. We provide funding for non-medical helper support to students who are not eligible for Disabled Student Allowance (for example, our international students). Over the last three years we have consistently seen the positive impact of this support on success rates at Part 1, and on degree outcomes for our disabled students relative to the wider cohort. For example, in 2020/21, the proportion of disabled students achieving First or Upper Second class honours was 4.6pp higher than non-disabled students, whereas the gap for the sector as a whole was -0.8pp.

SE6

Working in collaboration with our students and colleagues, we continue to expand and improve our already strong physical and digital learning resources to create an environment that fully responds to and support our students' learning needs. We recognise the interplay and dependencies between both the physical and digital estates, establishing our Committee for Infrastructure of Learning and Teaching in 2019 to provide strategic overview. Our vision and planning are long-term, with £225 million committed to digital technology and the physical estate over the next 5 years.

Teaching, Learning and Study Spaces

From 2016-2019 we invested nearly £100 million in buildings and facilities. Ranging from high quality formal spaces to specialist discipline-specific facilities (described in SE2), these spaces are core to enriching and supporting the learning experience.

Students have benefited from the extensive £40 million Library refurbishment completed in 2019, which provides a modern, inclusive and comfortable study environment, with 300 additional spaces for individual and group study, improved IT infrastructure additional PCs, and better access for disabled users. The IT helpdesk has been relocated to the Library building, providing on-point support to the student community. The Library collections are essential to supporting teaching and learning, so we have focused additional investment and development on improving students' access to online resources, for example, increasing our ebook holdings by 20% to over 613,000 since 2018/19.

Despite this considerable investment and improvement, we were materially below benchmark in NSS scores for Learning Resources in 2019 and 2020, the period corresponding with the Library refurbishment. Library resources and study spaces were maintained during the period of refurbishment, but these were not always within the central Library building. All efforts were made to maintain a very high-quality student experience, but disruption did occur, and student feedback cited not seeing the benefit of the Library refurbishment during their time as students and the issue of dispersed study space as the cause of dissatisfaction. We have learned from this, and those lessons have been incorporated into our planning for future changes to the physical and digital estate. Actions we have already taken, as evidenced below, include complementing our flagship investments with smaller initiatives from which our students will see immediate benefit. There has been a considerable reduction in the gap between indicator and benchmark, from -11.0pp in 2019 to -2.0pp in 2022, largely down to the improvement in satisfaction with Library services (Q19) from 69.5% in 2019 to 82.4% in 2022.

We have modernised lecture space (£2.3 million), continually incorporating new technologies and improving access. Across our estate, we have refurbished rooms as part of a rolling programme of improvements, and created additional flexible teaching spaces to facilitate active and collaborative learning. Responding to student feedback, we have committed £400,000 to create more study

facilities, involving students in the design of these new spaces. We have also introduced informal seating spaces within our teaching and learning buildings to foster social interaction and enable informal learning.

We continue to add to our existing portfolio of high-quality specialist facilities [SE2] for subject-specific resources that enhance teaching and learning. A new £55 million purpose-built Health and Life Sciences building provides students across biology, biomedical sciences and ecology with spacious and flexible new teaching laboratories, the latest audio-visual equipment and new study spaces. Our Cole Museum of Zoology was integrated into this space, with students involved in the co-design, move, installation and ongoing management. Our new Clinical Simulation Facility, developed in partnership with the NHS, has doubled the size of our clinical teaching space, broadening our clinical training capabilities to support student and healthcare professional training. It contains seminar and de-brief rooms, multiple consultation rooms with simulation equipment, a mock pharmacy and a four-bed ward, providing the environment for our students on relevant courses to develop essential practical skills.

Our museums and collections are a rich learning resource [SE3], cutting across many disciplines and subjects in their themes and strengths. Alongside strategic additions to our collections, we have made significant physical and digital infrastructure improvements (£500,000) to the access, preservation and management of our assets over this period. We have developed innovative approaches and facilities to support student learning. These include: a Virtual Reading Room to allow access to digitised collections; bespoke art study space with teaching capacity to engage students with our art collections; an online exhibition tool for our collections that students have used to create public-facing online exhibitions as part of their assessments; and ongoing cataloguing and digitisation of collections aimed to enhance access for teaching.

Digital Learning Infrastructure and Technologies

We have invested over £10 million in digital initiatives from 2018 to 2022 to enrich the student experience of teaching, learning and assessment. This includes £5 million in developing and adopting end-to-end institution-wide electronic management of assessment and feedback (collaborating with Blackboard to develop customised enhancements that are now used sector wide) [SE1]. It also includes £1.7 million invested in upgrading the technology in our teaching spaces and laboratories.

Responding to student feedback, we invested £1.1 million in Learning Capture for use across the campus, and £1.8 million in wi-fi upgrades and service improvements to increase coverage and reliability across campus and in halls of residence. Student ambassadors were part of the team developing our Student App, which makes vital information easily available on the go, helping students stay connected and informed. We also invested £250,000 in student welfare, including a Student Case Management system to support vulnerable students as part of our inclusive learning community.

Our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), Blackboard, provides the gateway to a thoughtfully selected and integrated suite of learning technologies that facilitate collaboration, support formative learning, engage students in live sessions, enable students to submit assessment and receive feedback. We have invested in our VLE infrastructure, engaged student focus groups to develop the interface to make it easier for students to find what they need, and improved accessibility and

use of alternative formats. Over 82% of 18,617 responses in our UG University module evaluations in 2020/21 definitely or mostly agreed that “the resources on Blackboard for this module supported my learning well”.¹⁴

SE7

Harnessing student voice, representation and partnership

Flowing from our values of community and excellence, partnership with our students is at the heart of all we do. We welcome student representatives as members of decision-making committees, including Council, Senate, University Board for Teaching Learning and Student Experience and its sub-committees, and discipline-based Boards of Studies and Student Experience. We also include students in all working groups that develop student-focussed initiatives and policies. These representatives initiate, lead and contribute to changes in policy and practice.

student representatives initiated proposals for self-certification for exceptional circumstances (introduced in 2021); and student representatives act as full partners in all change initiatives in relation to teaching, learning and student experience, from the redevelopment of our QA processes, through the University’s response to the pandemic, to the development of learning capture and the creation of different study spaces. Students contribute to decisions concerning resource – for example, study space development [SE6] – and changes to policy and practices in our professional services – for example, the extension of loan periods and removal of fines on most overdue books in our Library.

We engage students locally in the development of programmes through Student-Staff Partnership Groups, comprising elected student representatives from a group of programmes together with key staff. These consider how programmes are running, student representation on Boards of Studies and Student Experience, and module evaluation. Issues are raised and resolved through these processes, effecting often granular changes that are important to students’ experience and learning. These cover a broad range of developments, from making summative assessments formative to changing the weighting of assessments, from resolving bunching of deadlines to standardising workload across modules, and improving the communication of actions taken in response to module evaluation.

Our long-standing PLaT scheme [SE4] has funded student-staff co-creation initiatives for ten years. It has received international attention, led to publications in peer-reviewed journals, and influenced sector practice through conference presentations. A recent School of Law project, initiated in response to feedback about disabled students’ experiences during Covid-19, provided valuable insights and enhanced existing work to ensure more accessible and inclusive learning in blended formats in the School. These included: scheduled lecture release; the formation of study groups; the consistent use of weekly plans; and consistent Blackboard layout. Many of these have been adopted across the University.

Student Voice and Partnership Project

Our Student Voice and Partnership Project was a targeted and prompt response to a decline in NSS Student Satisfaction with Student voice in the NSS 2018. It supported institution-wide and School-level improvements in promoting the student voice and embedding working in partnership with a diverse range of students. Some of the outputs of the work include: our Principles of Partnership, developed collaboratively with students; guides for staff, including an online toolkit and

guides on working in partnership with students, fostering a sense of community and closing the feedback loop; updating policies and practices, such as moving from Student Staff Liaison Committees to Student Staff Partnership groups; and investment in a dedicated Student-Staff Partnerships Manager.¹⁵

We are proud that our NSS metrics now show a clear upward trajectory against benchmark over the relevant four-year period, from -6.5pp in 2019 to +3.5pp in 2022. We are confident of sustaining this trend as student partnership continues to embed institutionally and locally.

The University of Reading Student Panel

Our Student Panel actively contributes to shaping the student experience. Each year we recruit 50 paid student panellists who match the demography of our student body to help us shape major change initiatives, including our current Portfolio Review programme and our work towards University Mental Health Charter submission, both of which will have profound benefits for student experience. In each of the last two years we have dedicated at least one of our three Student Panels to improving Assessment and feedback [SE1]. The outputs of the 2021 panel have been used to develop bespoke best practice workshops with Computer Science and the School of Chemistry, Food and Pharmacy, both areas being materially below benchmark for NSS outcomes in teaching and assessment. to create

a visually appealing, student-friendly set of Assessment and feedback resources using the outcomes from our spring term Student Panel. These guides 'by students for students' explore questions such as 'What is feedback?' and 'What do I do with feedback?' using authentic student voices in the way of testimonials and feedback stories.¹⁶

Student Partners

Our long-standing work with our students as partners has been expanded and formalised with our Student Partners scheme. Student Partners are employed to work collaboratively with colleagues within each academic School to improve the student experience and provide valuable work and learning opportunities for students.

Our Student Partners scheme meant that we were able to put students at the heart of our response to the pandemic. Sixty-five Student Partners were employed to work across all our academic Schools prior to the Autumn term 2020 to collaborate with teaching staff on the development of blended learning resources and activities. They also produced guidance 'for students from students' and 'from students for staff' on flexible and blended teaching. Since then, a total of 142 Student Partners have influenced progress towards objectives around Assessment and feedback, Student voice and partnership, and other School priorities, including equality and diversity, and education for sustainable development.

In areas where subject-level NSS scores for Student voice are materially below benchmark, we have fully capitalised on the opportunity that the scheme offers. In 2021/22 Computer Science match-funded the central resource with School funds to secure the employment of additional Student Partners and bolster the culture of partnership in their area. As a result, satisfaction scores have improved for Student voice, from 56.6% in 2021 to 71.4% in 2022. The School of the Built Environment is adopting the same approach in the current year.

Inclusion Consultants

In 2021/22, we launched our Inclusion Consultants pilot scheme. This is a targeted intervention to

engage our global majority students in co-creating initiatives that address awarding gaps and foster racial inclusion. Nineteen students from across each of our academic Schools undertook comprehensive training to carry out paid work that included collaboratively reviewing course materials, events, activities and projects alongside colleagues.

Having evaluated and observed the impact of this approach, we have expanded its scope. This academic year, 25 students who identify as being from an 'underrepresented group' have been recruited, enabling a greater insight into issues related to disability, gender identity, neurodiversity and socio-economic status, as well as ethnicity and faith.¹⁷

Our Inclusion Consultants have influenced activities and decision-making on a wide range of issues, including the Muslim student experience, harassment reporting and support, pastoral support in halls of residence and wider inclusion practice, such as our Decolonising the Curriculum project.

3. Student Outcomes

SO1

We have a consistently excellent track record of ensuring our students continue with their studies after their first year, successfully complete their degree programmes, and progress to positive work or study destinations after graduating. Our headline indicators, relative to benchmark, are positive for Continuation (+0.5pp), Completion (+1.4pp) and Progression (+1.9pp). Continuation for the student cohort most affected by Covid-19 was materially above benchmark (+2.8pp).

Overwhelmingly, our split metrics are either in line with or materially above benchmark across all outcome measures (SO2-3). This reflects a well-developed and highly flexible system of support and development that is adaptable to the needs of different students and tailored to disciplinary context. Our system is holistic: identifying potential barriers to success; proactively targeting students most at risk; and delivering relevant and engaging support services that work [see also SE2 and SE5]. Our student support teams work closely with colleagues in academic Schools and with RUSU.

Addressing barriers to attainment at source

Barriers to successful continuation through, and completion of, a university degree extend far beyond the academic sphere. The lived experience of our students in terms of housing, personal finance, mental health and wellbeing are critical enablers: security in these areas is necessary (although not sufficient) for academic success. Student experience of workplace environments is also important for personal development and career progression after graduating. The provision of a secure, and opportunity-rich living environment serves as the platform on which our system of student support is built.

We guarantee on-campus accommodation for all new undergraduate students to help them settle into our community, with the majority (around two-thirds) taking this up. Proximity to each other on-campus creates an immediate sense of belonging and community that is further enhanced by a programme of regular and inclusive social events. To complement the 170 wide-ranging RUSU-supported clubs, societies and voluntary groups (with almost 5,000 members), our Student Life Team runs a portfolio of student social events, focusing on free, interactive and non-alcohol activities that appeal to different groups of students. We have active support networks for LGBTQ+, global majority, disabled, international and women students. This is further

supplemented by support for students who may feel in a minority due to their current life circumstance, such as student families, commuter, mature, under-18, and care experienced and estranged students. A residential early start programme for students diagnosed with an autism spectrum condition provides additional support for moving into accommodation and social activities.

We know that sport and exercise outside team clubs is also an effective mechanism for students to build and maintain peer relationships. Our sports provision is driven by an 'active campus' strategy, prioritising engagement over competitiveness. The SportsPark provides both students and colleagues with access to a wide variety of indoor and outdoor sports facilities and classes at highly competitive rates. We also have a range of walking, running and cycling trails across our campuses to encourage active use of our beautiful environment.

During the Covid-19 lockdowns, sport and social activities were curtailed, but we responded immediately and imaginatively. A Student Support and Welfare tactical group was immediately formed to monitor and meet students' evolving needs on a week-to-week basis. This group co-ordinated a vast range of initiatives over an almost two-year period, including high-quality food supplies for isolating students (featured on Radio 4, the Food Programme, 8 November 2020); the isolation buddy scheme (Support our Students or SoS); named case officers for every student with Covid-19; a Covid-19 advice hotline; an online social activities programme; regularly refreshed guidance on mental wellbeing; and sports and fitness alternatives. This work was critical in enabling our 2019 entrants to continue with their studies at such a trying time [SO2].

The value of our long-standing Life Tools programme, which provides students with essential resilience-building tools, has become increasingly evident in recent years. The programme has grown three-fold since 2018/19 to almost 150 sessions, reaching around 2,500 students each year.¹⁸ To extend its reach, a quarter of sessions are tailored for delivery within the curriculum, and many are now delivered online. Impact is enhanced by our paid student champions, who facilitate active engagement by working in partnership with staff to ensure webinars are student-centric and meet current student need.

We take a multi-layered approach to addressing the money concerns that so often cause anxiety and impair student learning. In addition to our student hardship budget, a new Digital Support Fund ensures that students from low-income families can afford IT equipment, software and internet connectivity necessary for successful study. To keep pace with the demand for financial guidance, we partner with the financial education platform Blackbullion. Almost 4,000 students have made use of this platform since 2019/20, taking on average between three and four courses on a range of topics. They have indicated a high level of confidence in their ability to manage their finances as a result. Our on-campus student employment agency, Campus Jobs, has also expanded to provide more accessible and fairly-paid work for students. In 2021/22, more than 2,400 students were employed through Campus Jobs (up by one-third since 2019/20), resulting in £2.8 million being paid to students.

Supporting professional development

76.6% of our full-time students progress into managerial or professional employment, further study or other positive outcomes, 1.9pp above our benchmark. The equivalent figure for those completing a professional placement year is 83.2%, demonstrating how this experience supports the career development of our students as well as their financial wellbeing. We have a framework

to support all students to undertake a placement year (except where professional bodies require that work experience takes another form). This involves a 'whole lifecycle' approach to supporting and encouraging participation, including our Placements Work support programme, removal of known barriers to participation through guaranteed hall accommodation on return and access to bursaries, and a dedicated professional team providing one-to-one support for students. Our good practice in supporting student mental health whilst on placement was recently showcased by UUK.¹⁹

Covid-19 brought particular challenges for student access to placements and work experience. In response, we established partnerships with two virtual internship providers, resulting in almost 1,000 students completing internships across the 2019/20 and 2020/21 academic years. We also fund two placement schemes: the Reading Internship Scheme providing work experience within SMEs; and our Undergraduate Research Opportunities Programme (UROP) scheme, supporting research placements. Around 200 students participate in these schemes each year, of whom 65% identify as global majority or disabled, or are from a low-participation neighbourhoods or families with low household income. These schemes grew by almost 20% between 2018/19 and 2021/22. By autumn 2022, the proportion of students reporting they had done no work experience (or volunteering) in the previous 12 months had returned to within 2% of pre-pandemic levels.

The Reading Experience and Development (RED) Award provides a formal mechanism for identifying, reflecting on and recognising skills development from a wide range of work experience outside the curriculum. During the TEF period 1,989 students have completed the RED Awards, with 65% of participants from under-represented groups compared with 57% of the total cohort. This year we have launched the Sustainable Action and Global Engagement Awards (SO5), which also involve gaining developmental experience outside the curriculum. Our analysis shows that RED participants are 68% more likely to secure a job prior to graduation than non-participants.

SO2

Our Continuation (+0.5pp) and Completion (+1.4pp) indicators are broadly in line with benchmark, demonstrating the effectiveness of our extensive student support services and activities. The key feature of these data is the consistently strong outcomes achieved by our students across all demographic and subject groups. The outstanding efforts of our student support and welfare teams during the Covid-19 pandemic are evident in the most recent year of continuation data, relating to the cohort entering in 2019/20, which are materially above benchmark (+2.8pp). This provides a vivid illustration of our ability to respond rapidly and flexibly to support students in the face of unprecedented challenges.

Student demographics

Split metrics by demographic groups for both Continuation and Completion are uniformly in line with or materially above benchmark. The Completion indicators for students aged on entry 21-30 (+3.4pp above benchmark) and 31 and above (+2.9pp) offer clear evidence that our support extends beyond the mainstream undergraduate community of recent school leavers. The Completion indicators of non-UK domiciled students (+3.7pp) demonstrate the inclusivity of our support systems and of our curriculum design.

The strength of our Continuation and Completion data across all student groups reflects the effectiveness with which we target and tailor support. We recognise that difficulties faced by students manifest themselves in different ways, which may not be widely visible, so we have

developed a variety of mechanisms to identify students at greatest risk. Academic tutors are able to access near real-time data on student engagement to identify and support students who appear to be struggling [SE5]. All staff throughout the University are provided with clear and concise guidance about how to raise concerns about a student. Students themselves are actively encouraged to monitor their own welfare through our bespoke online 'Wellness Checker' and over 3,000 students have benefited since its launch in January 2020.

Once identified, even students facing the most serious challenges are likely to progress and complete their studies. Almost 1,200 students used our Student Welfare Team in 2021/22, several of whom report that they had been considering leaving the University before they made contact with the team. After receiving support, 88% of these students at Part 1 successfully progressed to Part 2, and 77% of final year students attained a 1st or 2.1 degree.

A complete change to our model of counselling has also facilitated better access to support by reducing waiting lists and improving risk management. In 2020/21, the service achieved an increase of 16 percentage points in the proportion of registered students it was able to see, compared to the previous year. This improved structure for counselling and welfare support is having a powerful impact on Continuation and Completion. The same proportion of students supported by our counselling service progressed from Part 1 to Part 2 in 2020/21 (93%) as for all UoR students, and a higher proportion of these students attained a 1st or 2.1 degree (87%) compared to our general student population (82%).

Subject disciplines

At subject level, our Continuation and Completion indicators are also overwhelmingly positive, with particularly strong continuation data for Education and teaching (+4.3pp) and our Apprenticeship provision (+3.2pp), illustrating the adaptability of our system in meeting the needs of students across the full breadth of our programme portfolio [see also SE1]. Completion indicators are materially above benchmark for Business and management (+3.0pp), Education and teaching (+5.3pp), and Architecture, building and planning (+4.5pp). These subject areas account for nearly one-third of our undergraduate student body.

Key to our strategic co-ordination of student support is a carefully planned integration of department-based academic tutoring and guidance, with centrally organised support activity. The institutional relaunch of our Academic Tutoring system [SE5] was designed in conjunction with the creation of our Student Welfare team, to ensure that academic resource is concentrated more effectively on providing discipline-specific support. Our centrally managed support teams, whether they are responsible for student welfare, disability support or careers advice, work closely in conjunction with Schools to ensure that students receive support that is embedded within their disciplinary context.

Continuation rates for Undergraduate with postgraduate components, and the (substantially overlapping) Pharmacology, toxicology and pharmacy subject area are both materially below benchmark (as is the very much smaller General, applied and forensic sciences, which has a denominator of only 30 and a high benchmark (95.3%)). In order to understand these data and ensure students are fully supported to achieve good outcomes, the Department of Pharmacy has undertaken in-depth analysis of potential factors that influence student continuation and found no significant differences for students who are first generation in HE, commuters or with a declared disability. However, students who enter the MPharm programme with a BTEC qualification were

found to have lower continuation rates compared to students entering with A-level or other qualifications. In response to this, over the past year the Department has increased revision and exam technique support. We have also begun a review of the assessment strategy, benchmarking our progression requirements with other Schools of Pharmacy, adapting assessments from closed book exams to more authentic and applied open book assessments, and implementing new standard setting for assessments. This work is ongoing and is being monitored closely.

SO3

The success of our Careers and Employability Team is evident in the career progress made by our students after graduation. The difference between our indicator and benchmark for Progression stands at +1.9pp. Our Progression metrics are either in line with or materially above benchmark for each of the three years for which data are captured in this TEF cycle. The most recent LEO data further indicate that half of our subject areas with reportable data were in the top quartile for region-weighted median salaries one year after graduation. Reading was rated as #4 'Best UK Universities for Careers Service' in the 2022 StudentCrowd Awards (based solely on independent student reviews).

Student demographics

Over 60% of our home undergraduate population comes from demographic groups that nationally have lower rates of progression into graduate employment; yet, graduate outcomes survey data consistently show our students to be more likely to achieve positive outcomes than the sector average (75% vs 73.4% in the most recent survey).

A key strategic tool that has driven our targeting of employability activity is the annual career registration data collection. This allows us to understand what stage students are at in their career planning and, when combined with other demographic data, it provides a powerful tool to tailor our support. In spring 2021, for example, we called 755 Part 2 students (22% of the cohort) who self-identified as having little/no work experience but were ready to explore options; 83% of appointments booked as a result were with students who had not previously met with a careers consultant. This data source means that, in addition to traditional careers fairs, we can now provide a series of sector-themed weeks based directly on our students' career interests. Participation from both students and employers has increased dramatically (by 207% and 380% respectively) since we piloted this approach in 2018/19.

Our award winning Thrive career mentoring scheme is targeted at Part 2 students, with over 1,300 students trained and matched with a mentor since 2018. Thrive is specifically designed to address barriers to graduate employment often experienced by students from under-represented groups, especially those less likely to have their own access to professional networks.²⁰ In 2022, these students made up 64% of the Thrive cohort. Thrive participants are 32% more likely to have secured a job before completing their final year than non-participants in the scheme.

In 2018/19, we launched an ambitious Finalists Programme tailored for the needs of final year undergraduate students, again targeted at under-represented groups (constituting 69% of participants in 2020/21). The programme includes Career Smart (an online course to prepare students for graduate recruitment), call campaigns, targeted career coaching, an assessment centre simulation and a workshop programme. Around 1500 students have engaged with the programme each year since 2018.²¹ Our analysis shows that students completing Career Smart are more likely to be actively pursuing graduate opportunities at the start of their final year,²² and students participating in the assessment centre simulation reported marked increases in

confidence with all aspects of the process they had experienced.²³ In 2020, the Finalists programme received the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services Supporting Student/Graduate Employability award.

Our split metrics for Progression demonstrate that our strategic targeting of careers support has benefited students from all demographic groups. All groups of students based on age, ethnicity, sex, disability, domicile or socio-economic background show Progression indicators in line with or materially above benchmark. Groups for whom progression is materially above benchmark include female students (+2.6pp), those from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 (+2.6pp), those from ABCS quintile 1 (+7.0pp), and those aged 21-30 (+5.2pp). This maps onto the extensive and targeted support we have provided, particularly for students from backgrounds under-represented in higher education.

Subject disciplines

Employability and skills development is embedded directly into the curriculum. Specialist careers consultants are assigned to each subject area. This ensures that all students are proactively engaged, not just those confident in seeking out additional support. Our Curriculum Framework requires that programmes are designed to support the achievement of our graduate attributes [SO5]. Dedicated academic developers, careers consultants and our Engage in Employability toolkit support programme teams to review, develop and embed employability in their curriculum. All our undergraduate degree programmes include a (micro, mini or maxi) placement opportunity, which forms a discipline-relevant opportunity to apply skills learnt in the classroom in real life. In 2021/22, the University supported approximately 3,400 in-curriculum placement opportunities across the institution – a 59% increase on 2018/19. These range from Psychology students working to support an autism clinic to classicists working within our own Ure Museum. We know that even a short-term placement can bring a financial burden and that, in many disciplines, the available opportunities tend to be unpaid. So we offer placement bursaries to reduce or remove financial barriers and to ensure equality of opportunity.

We do see variability in our split metrics at subject level. Ten (out of 24) subject areas with reportable data are materially above benchmark. These include some of our largest programmes, collectively accounting for over half of our student population. Five subjects are materially below benchmark, constituting 17.4% of our student body in 2020/21. These underperforming subjects have been specifically targeted through our Career Smart course and our Finalist programme initiative. The Graduate Outcomes survey already shows strong improvement in positive destinations between 2018/19 and 2019/20 for three departments: Geography and Environmental Science (from 59% to 68%), Biological Sciences (68% to 79%) and Economics (72% to 82%).²⁴ While this work takes time to feed through into Progression data, we are confident that we will see further progress in coming years.

SO4

Educational Gains

Our approach to educational gains is embedded in our Curriculum Framework as graduate attributes, developed by our colleagues in partnership with students and employers, these are: mastery of the discipline; skills in research and enquiry; personal effectiveness and self-awareness; and global engagement and multi-cultural awareness¹.

They reflect the sort of institution we are: multi-cultural, campus-based, research-rich, offering a breadth of subject areas, and highly supportive of our students. We enable our students, personally and academically, to do their best during their time with us and equip them well for their

future lives and careers. The delivery of these attributes is tailored to our students in the context of their discipline and communicated to students as part of their programme. They form part of the programme learning outcomes and are reflected in our assessment criteria. As part of our current portfolio review, we are further embedding these attributes and better articulating them to our students.

SO5

Mastery of the discipline

Our programmes are designed to provide students with a breadth and depth of knowledge of their discipline and its applicability in real-world contexts. They develop subject-specific skills and attributes, including understanding of disciplinary epistemologies and methodologies. The core teaching and assessment activity undertaken in academic departments, and described in the Student Experience section above, is explicitly designed to support students to develop this mastery of their discipline. This involves: classroom-, lab- and studio-based teaching sessions; practical experiments and simulation exercises; fieldwork and study visits; real-world placements and internships; and a diverse range of formative and summative assessments [SE2]. At an institutional level, we supplement this core teaching and learning activity with a range of study support that is accessed by students from different disciplinary backgrounds. This is designed to equip students with the necessary skills to fully engage in their studies [SE5].

Skills in research and enquiry

Our programmes are designed to ensure students become aware of research and enquiry within their discipline, consume and appraise research critically, and have opportunities progressively to design, undertake and present research as appropriate to their discipline [SE3]. Our Study Advice Team [see SE5] and our Academic Liaison Librarians, who support staff to ensure that appropriate discipline-specific data and materials are available, also run sessions with students to help them navigate the extensive relevant databases and resources.

Students are also encouraged and supported to pursue co-curricular research activities. Approximately 100 students each year undertake paid summer internships on our UROP scheme, collaborating directly with leading researchers and co-authoring outputs²⁵ [SO1]. Students regularly present work at the British Conference for Undergraduate Research and have a track record of publishing in academic outlets and presenting at the Posters in Parliament event.

Personal effectiveness and self-awareness

The aim is that our students are self-aware, reflective, intellectually curious and resilient. These skills are developed throughout their programmes in disciplinary appropriate ways. Specialist careers consultants from our award-winning Careers and Employability Team are allocated to each subject area, working closely with academics to ensure that the personal development of students is embedded within programme design, as well as supported through extra- and co-curricular activities, or through placements or internships [SO3]. We integrate career learning and professional development into the curriculum in discipline specific ways. Modules such as 'Legal Skills' (Law), 'Going Public' (History), 'Developing Professional Excellence' (Business) and 'Professional Practice' (Archaeology), are examples.

Alongside their curriculum, our Life Tools programme [SO1] equips students with essential skills that underpin a successful student experience, from financial planning to managing stress. The

long-established RED Award [SO1] provides a successful mechanism for engaging students in a range of voluntary or work-based activities, and to reflect on their learning and development.

Global engagement and multi-cultural awareness

Our students benefit from studying alongside students from 150 other countries, with 19.5% of our full-time UK-based undergraduate population in 2020/1 being non-UK domiciled (compared to the sector average of 17.6%). We seek to develop our students' intercultural competence and valuing of diversity, enabling them to collaborate effectively and adapt to different work and study contexts.

Our International Study and Language Institute supports colleagues across the University planning for the internationalisation of their curriculum. They have also created modules, available to all students, as part of a 'global graduate' programme. These include 'Intercultural Competence and Communication' and 'Modern Britain' (the latter being of particular interest to international students). We have also engaged in a major project to decolonise the curriculum. We have recently expanded our RED Award scheme to include a 'Global Engagement' strand that allows students to demonstrate, and to reflect on, their global engagement activities.

Our global connections allow us to offer a variety of study abroad options. Our Malaysia campus makes international mobility much easier in the context of a three-year degree. In the last five years we have opened up new partnerships allowing for student mobility to locations such as South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan. We have also expanded our range of short-term options for students through summer schools across Europe and Asia. Alongside these options, we have created online international learning opportunities that do not require travel such as the 'Experience China' virtual summer school and at Sophia University in Japan.

SO6

We were one of 13 collaborative projects involving 70 universities and colleges in the three-year OfS-funded Learning Gain Project. Our project evaluated a range of methodologies for measuring graduate attributes, which, taken together formed something close to a global view of what students gain in skills, competencies, content knowledge and personal development during their time with us.²⁶

Of the methodologies explored, the attainment data model yielded the most robust and useful results. The main data source was the University's student record system, containing data on students' academic performance and background characteristics (such as demographic and other entry profile data). These data allowed us to map student academic trajectories from Year 1 to Year 3, using their yearly average (median) marks as an outcome measure. This has sparked useful internal discussion on how learning gain can be measured and highlighted some areas for skills development and instances where programmes need to reconsider their assessments and marking criteria.

We also collected data through the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA+), the UK Engagement Survey (UKES) and the Student Wellbeing Survey (WBS) in order to relate these trends in academic performance to changes in critical thinking skills, student engagement and wellbeing. Despite extensive promotion, low student engagement with these has limited our ability to form any meaningful conclusions from the data collected.

Through our current process of Portfolio Review, we are ensuring that our four graduate attributes are fully mapped on to programme-level learning outcomes and, as such, are assessable within

the curriculum. **Mastery of the discipline** will be measured using core attainment data drawn from core modules within each programme that address central disciplinary concepts allowing us to measure with more confidence: a) the extent to which students are achieving this graduate outcome at subject level as well as institutionally; b) the extent to which students' mastery of their discipline improves as they move through their studies. Each of our programmes has a module (or modules) with **global engagement/multicultural awareness** as a learning outcome, which will also be captured by this data.

A summative measure of **skills in research and enquiry** will be generated from capstone dissertation/ project modules, allowing us to identify and assess more clearly how well students are developing skills that are specifically related to research and enquiry.

Personal effectiveness and self-awareness will be evaluated through the completion of a skills audit, along the lines of the JISC self-evaluation tool for digital literacy. This tool provides a personalised report that signposts students to specific digital resources to help them address particular skills gaps. Tracking sign-up rates to these online resources (e.g., through LinkedIn Learning) will provide an additional source of evidence that students are aware of their skills needs and are actively addressing these.

4. Conclusion

The University of Reading is committed to the transformative power of outstanding teaching for individuals and for society as a whole, led by our values of community, excellence and environment. We are proud of the valued and rewarded role that teaching plays in delivering on our strategic purpose.

The transformation of our teaching and learning environment over the last four years has been driven by a bold plan of coordinated activity, driven by our Curriculum Framework. As a community of colleagues and students working together, we are gratified to be at the forefront of the sector for Student voice, and for Continuation, both of which were materially above benchmark by the end of the TEF period. This reflects the strength of our commitment to providing an inclusive campus environment in which students are valued and supported. Equally important are the notable improvements in areas, such as Assessment and feedback and Learning resources.

These improvements in our metrics have been driven by strategically targeted and co-ordinated projects, but the implementation of these has been highly sensitive to disciplinary context. Discipline-based skills and knowledge are at the core of our Curriculum Framework, and the embedding of our strategic priorities across such a diversity of subject areas has been key to our approach. Nowhere is this more evident than in our approach to graduate employability, ensuring that our graduates leave us equipped with an enviable mix of professional and academic competencies.

Throughout this submission, we have sought to demonstrate that an holistic approach to student experience and outcomes, designed to embrace and respond to diversity, creates a setting where our students can thrive and succeed – both during their studies and in their future careers.

5. References

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