

Provider name: The Oldham College

UKPRN: 10006770

1. Provider context

University Campus Oldham (UCO), the Higher Education (HE) campus of The Oldham College, hereafter referred to as the College, is in the heart of Oldham Town Centre and places the local community at the centre of its global vision. Our commitment is to provide excellent educational provision through creative, engaging and collaborative practice that will foster students' independence and academic identity. The College aims to develop graduates who are driven, and ambitious individuals equipped for industry, with the autonomy and capacity to think critically and take responsibility for their own lifelong learning, personal and professional development. The College is committed to delivering high quality, transformative HE courses that are informed by research and are embedded with professional experiences to encourage all students to feel challenged, intellectually stimulated and to become committed academic citizens and advocates for the College and the wider regionⁱ.

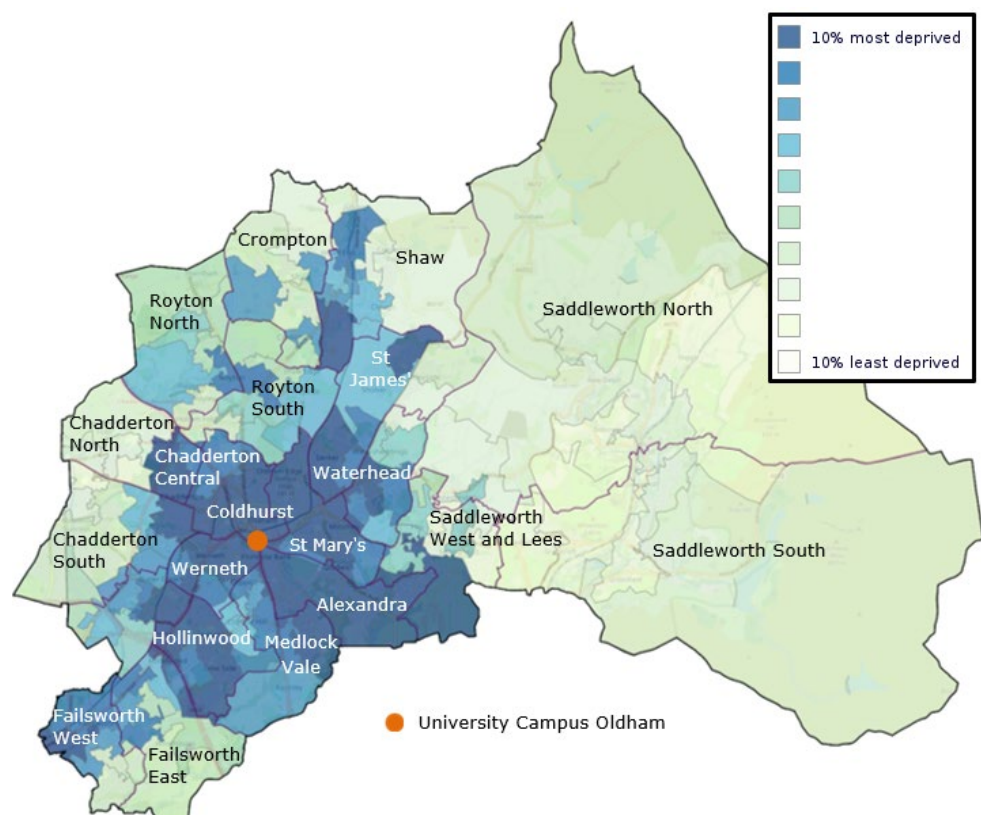
The College works with six awarding partners to deliver its HE provision; University of Huddersfield, Sheffield Hallam University, University of Central Lancashire, Open University, CMI and Pearson. This range of partners has provided an opportunity to refresh and update the curriculum in recent years, whilst responding to employers' needs. In 2020/21, the Office for Students (OfS) official statistics, as signed off by the Accountable Officer, show that the College had 552 HE FTE students with 514 HE FTE students registered on undergraduate programmes relevant to TEF. The College currently offers a mix of courses which include preparatory years, foundation degrees, three-year Honours degrees, Top Up degrees, Higher Nationals (including Higher Technical qualifications), a full suite of Teaching Education qualifications, Masters in Education, and Professional qualifications. UCO is led by the Assistant Principal for HE and Higher Skills, who is part of the College Principalship. Reporting to the Assistant Principal are three Faculty Leads, the Head of HE Quality and Registry, and the Head of Student Support and Wellbeing Services. UCO comprises 28 academic staff, 2 Academic Development Lecturers, and 6 specialist part time staff. There are 13 members of HE professional staff who have specialist roles across; Careers and Employability (1), Disability and Wellbeing (3), Quality (2), Library (4) and Academic Services (3). The College is an OfS registered provider, subscribes to the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). The College also subscribes to Advance HE, the Mixed Economy Group (MEG), the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON), and the National Association of Student Money Advisors (NASMA).

Oldham is one of 55 identified cold spots in the country, where school outcomes are the weakest, that have been designated as an Education Investment Area (EIA). The EIA's form part of the government's "[levelling up](#)" white paper, where "*education will be at the heart of major new reforms*" to give "*every child and adult the skills they need to fulfil their potential, no matter where they live*".ⁱⁱ [The Oldham Economic Review](#) has revealed that "*between 2005 and 2020 there has been a marked reduction in the numbers of adults who have no qualifications...and comparative skills performance at all levels remain low compared to other boroughs, while employment remains a problem. There is a higher proportion of economically inactive residents and above average numbers on incapacity benefit...There is a strong concentration of lower levels of skills achievement, and low incomes, in specific neighbourhoods. Pay levels and household incomes are also low in these places.*"ⁱⁱⁱ As articulated in the Oldham College Strategic Plan 2019 – 2024, "*technical and professional education and training delivered in new ways is the key to resolving the education and skills problem of the*

country, the City region and the town. Put at its simplest, it provides more directly useful, economically relevant and affordable routes to developing high skills, than our current system. More learners need to choose technical and professional pathways at 16 and 18, and they need more options of which pathway is best (university or work based) to acquire high skilled qualifications. The same options need to be extended to adults, who are seeking to up-skill and re-skill. The demand for change is coming from both education policymakers and from employers and for towns like Oldham, making this change work well is going to be critically important. At this time there is a growing acknowledgement that the 50 per cent of young people and adults who do not follow the residential university pathway to high skilled qualifications need a different model of provision - and those who do follow the established route need more choice".^{iv}

Our size and shape of provision data notes that 97.1% of our full-time undergraduates lived locally to our campus prior to entry, followed closely by our part-time undergraduates (96.2%), full-time postgraduates (94%), and part-time postgraduates (89.9%). Our internal data shows for the same four-year aggregate (2017/18 to 2020/21) that 63% of HE students enrolled lived within the Oldham Borough. The majority of these lived in the wards of Coldhurst (13%), Medlock Vale (8%), and St Mary's (8%)^v. The Indices of Deprivation (IMD Ranks 2019) highlight levels of deprivation in Oldham to be among the highest in the country, with 4 wards in Oldham having at least one rank in the lowest 1% nationally. The [Oldham Council Indices of Deprivation 2019 report](#) notes that "Oldham has a significant proportion of wards within the most deprived 10% or 20% in England on almost all of the measures within IMD... Half of wards are in the most deprived 20% in England overall, as well as in domains on Crime, Employment, Income, Education Skills & Training, and Health...Drilling down further, Alexandra, Coldhurst, St. Mary's and Werneth wards all have at least one rank in the 1% most deprived nationally...for Adult Skills, as in 2015, Coldhurst shows the most deprived position nationally (of 7180 wards), and St. Mary's 7th worst."^{vi} Our size and shape of provision data also notes that 84.3% of our full-time undergraduates were flagged as either within deprivation quintile (IMD) Quintile 1 or Quintile 2, 53% higher than the average of 31.3% for all OfS registered providers.

The map to the right shows the Multiple Indices of Deprivation 2019 for the Wards of Oldham, in location to UCO. For the same four-year aggregate (2017/18 to 2020/21), 43% of students enrolled on our HE courses had a 'high grade' English GCSE, and 36% had a 'high grade' Maths GCSE, on entry. Only 9% reported at enrolment that one of their parents had studied for a Higher-Level qualification.^{vii}



The OfS size and shape of provision data also demonstrates, over the period of the 2017/18 to 2020/21 academic years, that 65.6% of full-time students were over the age of 21 on entry, compared to 21.9% across all OfS registered providers. It is not contentious to suggest that as mature students they are less likely to have recent experience of education, and are not traditional students who go into HE at the age of 18 after being in further education. This is further demonstrated over the 4-year aggregate, which shows we have a higher rate of students from TUNDRA quintile 1 and 2 areas for both full time (47.1%) and part time (39.2%) undergraduate courses, compared to all OfS registered providers (22.3% and 33.3% respectively).

Such an educational context brings about a particular set of challenges when discussing student experience and graduate outcomes. The socio-economic landscape outlined above illuminates how the College provides crucial provision and opportunities to its local communities that are vital for improvement. The flexible, responsive, creative approach the College takes to HE Curriculum development and delivery means it is able to adapt to the changing educational environment; it values and promotes diversity in its student body and places students and their needs as top priorities. Occupying a niche in the HE market, by providing small class sizes and a welcoming, supportive, inclusive learning environment for all students, the College successfully engages non-traditional students across the spectrums of age, ethnicity, academic qualifications and family commitments. Moreover, the excellent level of personal support attracts students who may not traditionally aspire to progress to higher level study or who choose not to travel for their education. This is particularly important in Oldham where access to HE is below the national average, with areas of extreme poverty, and where for many of the local residents English is not the primary language spoken at home.

The Provider Contact and Student Contact collaborated to produce their submissions. The student contact was signposted to relevant webinars, the TEF indicator dashboard, and the TEF size and shape dashboard. In addition, the student contact was provided with reports, data, a list of courses in scope, and access to relevant policies and procedures. The student contact was offered weekly meetings with the provider TEF contact and the HE Student Experience and Quality Coordinator, between 7th November 2022 and 9th January 2023, to offer support and answer any questions. The student contact collaborated with both current students and recent alumni to gain additional evidence for their submission and utilised two Student Forum meetings (November 2022 and December 2022) to engage with current students and their views. The provider submission will not be including apprenticeships due to the low denominators in the metrics.

2. Student Experience

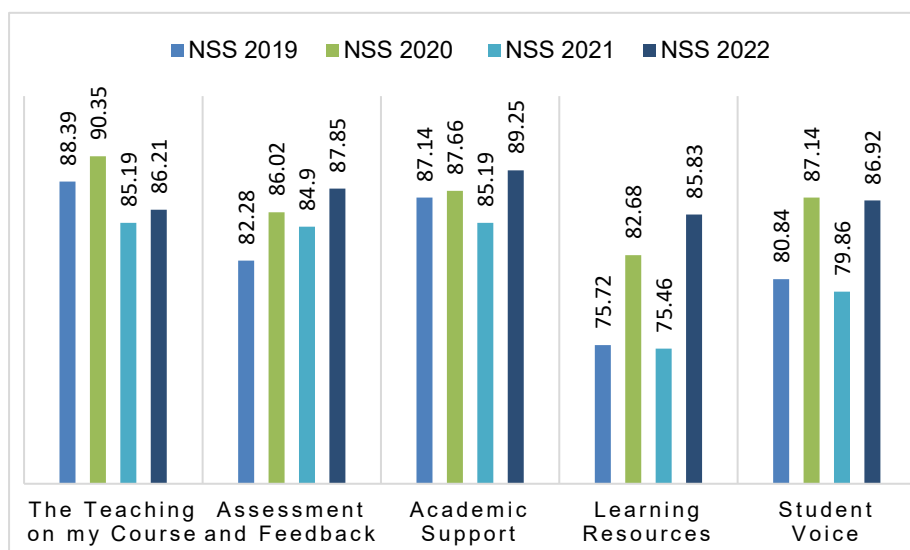
The College has a continued year-on-year rise in student satisfaction in the National Student Survey (NSS) compared to the sector as a whole, culminating in 2022 with a rating of 88.79%, 12.5% above the sector average of 76.29%.

Year	2019	2020	2021	2022
Oldham College Response Rate	88%	81%	84%	84%
Overall Student Satisfaction Oldham College	84.25%	88.98%	83.33%	88.79%
Overall Student Satisfaction Sector Wide	83.49%	82.65%	75.41%	76.29%
Oldham College vs. Sector	0.76%	6.33%	7.92%	12.50%

The NSS 2022 results show that the majority of the sector have struggled to return to the level of satisfaction seen pre-pandemic. Nationally, students' satisfaction with their courses at UK universities has recovered slightly compared with NSS 2021, but remains at record low levels, highlighting the significance of the College's 88.79% result.

The results received are testament to the support provided to students studying at the College, both academic and professional, particularly during the times they were affected by national and local lockdown restrictions.

(OC First-Class BA (Hons) in Business & Management graduate 2021/22), and recent winner of the



Association of Colleges (AoC) Higher Education Student of the Year Award, noted upon the NSS 2022 results publication *"I am not at all surprised by these results because my experience of UCO was so positive. What I really benefited from was the broad range and personalised nature of the academic and pastoral support available. The staff guided me to continually develop different skills and extract my full potential to apply to all types of assignments. In addition, the student representation and external challenge opportunities provided added greater value to my experience and directly contributed to my First-Class degree award."*^{viii} For NSS 2022, the OfS highlighted the College as significantly above benchmark in four of the eight core categories surveyed; Assessment and Feedback, Academic Support, Learning Community, and Student Voice. The College outperformed the sector on all core questions, with some questions scoring significantly higher than the sector average; *"It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on"* +29%, *"I have received helpful comments on my work"* +23%, and *"I feel part of a community of staff and students"* +22%.

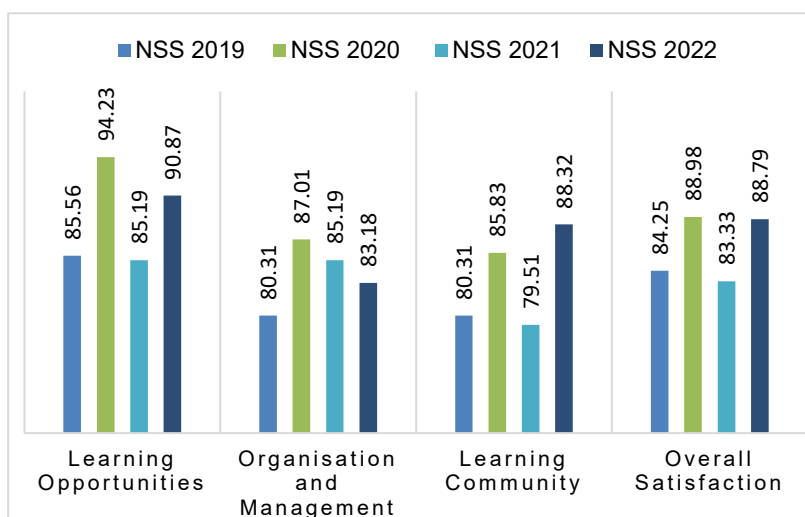
For the NSS results included in the TEF Student Experience indicators, our results for *Assessment and Feedback*, *Academic Support*, and *Student Voice* are noted as 99% materially above benchmark for full-time, followed by *the teaching on my course* at 66% materially above benchmark. Learning resources was the lowest rated area for us in each of the four years considered, and as can be seen from above, variates significantly year on year.

The drops which can be seen in NSS 2019 and NSS 2021 for Learning Resources can be attributed to specific course groups, BA (Hons) Games Art, and BSc (Hons) Psychology respectively. These drops in satisfaction can also be seen in our split indicators flagged as below benchmark for first degrees, and subject splits Creative arts and design, Computing, and Psychology. For NSS 2019, 38.46% of our final year BA (Hons) Games Art cohort surveyed were satisfied with our learning resources. This is in contrast to our other course within the subject area of Creative arts and design that year, BA (Hons) Graphic Design, where 78.57% of students were satisfied with learning resources. Having identified the need to invest in additional resources for the BA (Hons) Games Art course, a significant capital investment of over £28,000 during late 2019 ensured that the Games studio was equipped with a suite of 20 Intel Core i7 PCs and high-spec wide aspect monitors, in addition to Wacom tablets, a motion capture kit, and 3D printer to support development of the learning environment. Software has also been updated and broadened during subsequent academic years and Games students now benefit from access to the Adobe Creative Cloud, including the Substance 3D suite, complimented by the specialist applications 3DS Max, Maya, Blender, Unreal

Engine and Unity to maintain relevant and current industry standards. Following implementation of these improvements, the results received for our Games Art course for learning resources showed an improvement of 19.21% in NSS 2020, with a satisfaction rate of 57.69%, and this increased a further 22.31% in NSS 2021, with a satisfaction rate of 73.58%.

For NSS 2021, the drop seen in satisfaction for the majority of core questions for the College is contributable to the low satisfaction rate received from one course, BSc (Hons) Psychology, rather than due to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic which affected the sector more widely. The final year BSc (Hons) Psychology cohort had a historic dissatisfaction stemming from the information provided about the course and their enrolment onto year 0 (foundation year) of the course in academic year 2017/18. Despite early resolution attempts with the cohort over the four years of their studies, the disappointment in their early experience still resonated and this was reflected in the cohorts NSS results. The cohort scored learning resources particularly poorly in NSS 2021 at 28.89%. The results received in NSS 2022 for learning resources for this course showed an improvement of 51.11%, with a satisfaction rate of 80.9%.

For the areas of the NSS not included in the TEF student experience indicators, we have also scored well over the four years in scope across the other core question areas, and have scored above the sector average for the Overall Satisfaction question in each of the four years in scope. Student feedback received from the NSS is testament to the academic experience and support offered:



"I am very satisfied with all the resources and the support from the course team, academic skills team, library service. When I needed the support or guidance the course team would [be] there for us." **FdA in Health and Social Care NSS 2022**

"There were plenty of opportunities to be involved with developing and understanding the course. The course was delivered with care and dedication to the subject, which made learning more of a pleasure than a challenge." **BSc (Hons) in Psychology NSS 2021**

"The tutors have been very supportive throughout the course. They have helped me build up my skills and provide constructive criticism on my work so I can improve. The environment of the course allows me to feel relaxed and comfortable working on projects." **BA (Hons) in Digital Art for 3D Games and Media NSS 2020**

Academic experience and assessment

Our vision, as articulated in our HE Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) Strategy 2020/25 is to *"work in partnership with our students to deliver a personalised Higher Education (HE) experience, which aims to enthuse, inspire and challenge individuals to succeed. Our commitment is to provide excellent educational provision through creative, engaging and collaborative practice that will foster students' independence and academic identity."*^{ix} The TLA Strategy identifies three key themes that reflect our expectations: a) that HE education provision at the College will be of a consistently high

quality; b) that students will be regarded as co-creators in their learning; and c) to build sustainability and growth through engagement with partners and our local community. The Teaching, Assessment and Learning Committee (TALC) at UCO is responsible for the development and implementation of the TLA Strategy.

The College operates both externally validated and franchised partner models with our awarding institutions. In addition to the rigor of validation events, the College is continually reviewing the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and feedback, with our External Examiners playing a key role in ensuring the integrity and thoroughness of assessment practices and course content meets industry and sector-specific skills frameworks and are comparable with awards across the HE sector in England.

Employer engagement is a key feature of our curriculum design process: *“I firmly believe the course in its current or newly proposed form is absolutely vital to arts and culture in both Oldham, Greater Manchester and beyond. Particularly at the present time. It is my firm belief that arts provision in this way is vital to the town and its future part in culture, the profession itself and wellbeing.”* - **Oldham Coliseum Theatre, for BA (Hons) Performance and Entertainment^x**

Our approach to teaching, learning and assessment is tailored to the wide-ranging demographic of our students. As an example, we often see initial low levels of confidence in academic ability from our mature demographic, who typically join us following a substantial break from formal education. This can present itself as a barrier to learning, often leading to imposter syndrome and reducing the chances of achieving first time passes and/or achieving high grades. This was particularly prevalent on our FdSc Counselling and Psychotherapeutic Skills course in 2021/22, with 85% of enrolled students classed as mature on entry. The course team addressed these issues by implementing a supportive and scaffolded approach to teaching and learning, introducing workshops to ensure that all students were able to successfully transition into HE as part of their induction. This ranged from a personalised approach to the introduction of assignment briefs, through to engagement with the Academic Development Lectures and the Wellbeing team, in order to provide wraparound support to ensure that there was a holistic approach to addressing the needs of the students. The impact of this was that students made a great deal of academic progress between semester one and semester two, with mean grades from semester one modules at 50% increasing to 63% in semester two. This has also positively impacted the students' experience, reflected in the course feedback. Our 2021/22 Course Evaluation Questionnaire was sent to all 482 students. For FdSc Counselling and Psychotherapeutic Skills, Level 4 students responded. The results noted that 100% of students agreed with the statement *“I feel the course has enhanced my academic ability”*, and 100% of students agreed with the statement *“My course has challenged me to achieve my best work”*.^{xi}

Our HE Assessment, Feedback and Moderation Policy^{xii} recognises that timely and effective feedback to students and constructive use of assessment are integral to the learning process and have a considerable influence upon what and how students learn. We ensure that assessment and the associated feedback from tutors are critical components to teaching and learning, in both formative and summative assessments students are provided with accessible and constructive feedback that is developmentally appropriate for their continued progress, within 15 working days. All HE provision is subject to internal moderation by academic course teams, followed by external moderation by the validating partner institution, and an External Examiner. In operating this quality process, we are able to ensure that there is rigor and parity in assessment and grading. Academic staff who are new to teaching and/or the organisation have their entire assessment sample moderated, reducing over time and in line with their accuracy of grading. For all staff, where a single assessment constitutes 100% of the credits for a single module for an Honours degree, or is a

dissertation or research project, the entire assessment sample is also second marked. Course Leaders are responsible for developing a moderation schedule, a moderation sampling plan, and a course team moderation brief following relevant partner institution's regulations. Records of these are sent to the HE Quality Officer for Partnerships and centrally stored. Standardisation training sessions are delivered to ensure new staff are aware of the processes and that all team members are grading accurately and consistently. Further sessions are also delivered if any anomalies are highlighted during the moderation process, ensuring staff are supported to engage in high quality and rigorous assessment practices. Our External Examiners usually review a 10% sample of assessments and exam scripts, providing assurance that every element of assessment has been accurately applied.

The College operates Course and Module Review Boards, prior to partner exam boards, as well as its own Assessment Boards, where the authority to do so has been devolved to the HE Quality and Registry Team. External Examiners are invited to these events, monitoring the effectiveness, quality and standards, and ensuring full and fair consideration is given to each student presented. Examples of the feedback received from External Examiners includes^{xiii}:

"The marking appears to be appropriate, and the feedback is very good. The feedback comments are detailed and offer both advice on current and desired performance, which is great. The tone of the feedback is also good, managing to offer guidance on development while still remaining encouraging and positive. The work is being moderated, as evidenced by the internal moderation reports." **BSc (Hons) Psychology External Examiner 2021/22**

"There was a clear marking and moderation process across all modules... Whilst the marking and moderation process has been difficult this for the team this year (as in all HEIs), everything was provided in a timely way and staff were able to mark work to a high standard" **FdA and BA (Hons) Children and Young People External Examiner 2021/22**

"The quality of the work shows a definite upwards progression... all the students seem to understand how design works and the thinking that helps create good, powerful branding. As a general appraisal of the work, the course team has done a very good job. To a lesser and greater scale, all the students show engagement with the concepts of creative thinking and attempt to craft work that is original." **BA (Hons) Graphic Design External Examiner 2019/20**

"Internal moderation and feedback is robust and informative making it clear and easy to understand by students, as well as, for me to examine all the samples presented... To all students and staff, thank you and I would be delighted to see that this high standard of work by both students and staff is maintained next year and all students move on to the next level of their development both academically and professionally...The feedback is extensive and in an easy to understand format so students can clearly understand in which areas, in particular, they need to improve on. In a word, outstanding!" **BA (Hons) Education and Early Years External Examiner 2018/19**

Our internal 2021/22 Course Evaluation Questionnaire was sent to all 482 of our students, of which 51% responded. Of those that responded, 96% agreed with the statement *"My lecturers are passionate about what they are teaching"*, 96% agreed with the statement *"The feedback I received offered guidance on how I could improve"*, and 93% agreed with the statement *"I feel the course has enhanced my academic ability"*.

Students are taught by staff with expertise in their subject area, based on their academic knowledge and their industry and professional experiences – this ensures that students benefit from exposure to aspects of knowledge which are current and relevant to the workplace. Through the Guest

Speaker Programme students are exposed to a range of local, national and international experts and have the opportunity to engage with current thinking and practices. Having a rigorous staff recruitment and induction process in place enables us to provide high-quality, inspirational teaching. All new members of staff will either be working towards or hold a Masters qualification or higher. They are required to be a subject specialist, who holds or is working towards a teaching qualification and is an accredited member of a professional body where appropriate. All staff are also supported through the facilitation of a dynamic and systematic staff professional development programme. HE staff are encouraged to take advantage of teaching and learning and professional development opportunities in-house, at partner institutions, through conferences, and through knowledge exchange with other external partners.

“The strongest point about UCO is that the [tutors] have real world knowledge. This is beneficial because as a student of accounting, I can ask question related to industry and receive answers that are backed by real world experience, not just theory.” **Accounting & Financial Services BA (Hons), 2021/22 Student Induction survey**

All courses are embedded with employability skills developed through work-based learning and/or engagement with industry professionals. Employability skills and graduate attributes are underpinning themes within our provision at all levels. We continue to develop our employability strategy to ensure that we not only embed discipline specific professional skills into the curriculum, but also provide all students with a range of learning opportunities beyond the curriculum that support their personal and professional development. An example of this practice can be seen in our BA (Hons) Graphic Design course where industry relationships are firmly established within the curriculum providing the students with opportunities to engage in industry standard briefs created by our industry partner Forepoint, a creative and ideas agency. The aim is for students to demonstrate the skills and awareness of global, technological, humanitarian and community issues required from future creatives, whilst their HE experience is enhanced by the added value and impacts the work in their portfolio. This has raised ambition and confidence in the students who embraced the opportunity to pitch to a high-level industry specialist and potential employer.

Director of Forepoint Ltd, stated *“I have to say I was particularly impressed by the way that the students equipped themselves and expressed their ideas in their various presentations. Some great research and nice creative ideas formed the foundation of their work, which was brilliant to see. Each had tackled the brief with enthusiasm, passion, but also with their own unique twist.”*^{xiv}

All HE courses embrace theory and practice as integral elements of teaching, learning and assessment, ensuring all students are required at each level of study to undertake professional or work-based learning to build and develop their knowledge, understanding and skills for present and future employment opportunities.

Through our Applied Learning Model^{xv} (which is articulated further in the Student Outcomes section), professional or work-related learning is embedded into every course either through placements, live projects or research. Assessments are written around these attributes and linked to behaviors associated in practice. This ensures that all students benefit from equitable opportunities to engage in, extend and develop skills, attributes, knowledge and experience that prepares them for employment. One example of innovative delivery of the Applied Learning Model was seen when the 2020/21 BA (Hons) Performance Top-up cohort explored the theme of Poverty to create a devised performance based on research in the local area. This project highlighted the importance of social action and introduced students to local charities, receiving the following feedback from a local business; *“The collaborative project based around a theme of poverty was interesting and gave students opportunities to combine research with creative outputs. The piece also seemed relevant*

to the local area, thus demonstrating how the students are making a contribution to the wider community.” BA (Hons) Performance, External Examiner 2020/21^{xvi}

A further example of the use of the Applied Learning Model was seen through the Pandemic Project undertaken by 2021/22 BA (Hons) Education and Early Years students. This enabled students to reflect on their lived experiences of the pandemic and studying during a historical moment in time that caused the biggest disruption to education ever seen. Through the creative practices of poetry and art they worked to understand their own and others experiences during the global pandemic. The Project reflected on and recognised that whilst education was deemed ‘back to normal’ the experiences that those students had may have lasting effects on their lives and studies. The cohort of students went on to deliver the Project outcomes at the UCO Research Symposium.

“I got the sense of relief from the project, looking back and realising what we have been through and how we have overcome it bringing back and remembering all the experiences that I'd had forgotten about. Also seeing how others were impacted opened my eye to everyone's experience as they are all unique, some positive and some negative which I wouldn't have realised unless had taken part in the pandemic project.” BA (Hons) Education and Early Years student 2021/22^{xvii}

Resources, support and student engagement

At the heart of promoting innovative practices is the College Professional Development Review (PDR) process^{xviii}, which allows for HE teaching and professional staff to be set HE-specific targets and development, relating to research and scholarly activity, CPD, teaching, learning and assessment, student success, and student retention. As well as an annual meeting, the process encompasses regular reviews to discuss progress and support required throughout the year.

The College is a subscriber to Advance HE and all teaching staff are encouraged and supported to apply for Fellowship of Advance HE, with writing days organised to support the preparation and submission of applications (40% of academic staff have achieved membership of the HEA^{xix}). The College covers the cost of the application for staff.

Our Annual Evaluation Reporting (AER) Procedure^{xx} applies to all taught HE courses leading to credit or qualifications awarded by collaborative partners, and an AER must be produced annually for each course delivered. Course KPI data, along with stakeholder feedback (such as External Examiners, the course team, students, and employers) is added to the AERs by the HE Quality Team. The Course Leader will then critically reflect on both the quantitative and qualitative data provided and respond with commentary on the trends and issues it indicates. Actions set for the following academic year are endorsed by an AER Panel (attended by the Assistant Principal – HE and Higher Skills, and the Head of HE Quality and Registry) following approval by the Faculty Lead. Course Leaders are expected to monitor course operation on an ongoing basis throughout the year, to take prompt action where appropriate in response to feedback, and to document fully matters raised, together with their outcomes. The Applied Learning Model is evaluated as part of this process to measure impact of educational gains at course level.

The HE Observation of Teaching and Learning (OTL) and the Peer Observation and Support of Teaching (POST) schemes^{xxi} run annually to ensure the overall high quality of teaching, learning and assessment through the identification, sharing and celebrating of best practice. These processes also inform specific areas for development across the institution, directing the annual staff development programme. All staff are actively encouraged to share examples of good practice, disseminate research, scholarly and professional activity. The OTL scheme aims to recognise and raise the overall quality of teaching, learning and assessment practices in pursuit of developing

continued excellence in practice. The supportive structure and implementation of the process provides opportunity for meaningful learning and reflection and promotes ownership, instilling the concept of learning and developing practice through observation. The POST scheme, considering any initial findings and areas of potential collaboration from the OTL scheme, provides opportunity for academic staff to engage in a collaborative and non-judgmental review of their pedagogic practices. The UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) underpins this process through the expectation that HE academic staff have a commitment to continuing professional development and evaluation of their pedagogic practice. Practices and innovation identified through the OTL and POST schemes inform the themes of our annual Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) Symposium, along with sessions from external Keynote Speakers. Recent examples of themes at our TLA Symposiums include *Creativity - The Basis for How We Teach*, *The Digital Future of Teaching and Learning*, *Raising Awareness, Confidence and Knowledge in Effective Online Delivery*, and *Embedding Employability into the Curriculum*.

Through HE-specific contracts, with lower teaching hours as a requirement compared to FE Lecturers, the College recognises the specialist nature of HE curriculum, the need for staff to have time to engage in CPD, maintain currency and expertise in industry, and to undertake research and scholarly activity. A HE-specific staff development schedule runs annually and underpins the development of teaching, learning and assessment by providing structured support for all staff. A commitment to the continuous development of our staff is evidenced by the Staff Seminar Series, which involves monthly sessions throughout the two semesters, alongside the main Staff Development schedule. Staff contributions to development events and the Staff Seminar Series exemplify the ownership and pride that staff take in teaching, learning and assessment. The College facilitates vocational updating of academic staff and provides opportunities for them to gain the necessary knowledge and skills for delivery at HE levels, including financial support to gain higher and teaching qualifications. 86% of HE staff currently hold or are working towards Master's level qualifications, with 33% of academic staff having achieved or are currently studying for a doctoral level qualification.^{xxii}

Scholarly activity also informs and enhances teaching and learning, and curriculum development activities. HE staff are supported to attend and contribute to conferences through sponsorship funds from the College. Recently presented papers from College staff include;

The UCO Research Group annually celebrate the success of staff and student research activities at the UCO Research Symposium, and through an annual research publication - 'Spark'. Since its inception in the academic year 2017/18, Spark has published formal papers, abstracts and summaries of research activities, along with the results of collaborations with other academic

colleagues, employers and non-profit organisations. The journal is held with the British Library and has an ISSN and is available in print and digital format ([Spark Journal](#)).^{xxiii} Professor Oldham College lead Governor for HE, ran *Getting Published Research* workshops for HE staff, as part of the Staff Seminar Series, in 2019/20, and again in 2020/21.

The College operate a STAR Awards scheme^{xxiv}, recognising staff who have gone above and beyond on delivering on our Vision, Mission and Values. These are given out monthly to ensure that as many examples of outstanding contributions by staff are recognised throughout the Academic Year. In addition, the College holds an annual staff awards ceremony at the end of each academic year, examples of awards given at the most recent event were 'Outstanding Contribution to Student Achievement', 'Digital Hero', and 'Community Champion'. Our HE Learning and Resource Centre Team Leader won the 2021/22 award for Digital Hero, following successful project management of the introduction of our new HE specific VLE, its learning.

The delivery of our schedule of annual events encourages engagement from members of the public, employers, HE partners, students and alumni. These events include performances, festivals, end of year showcases, conferences and other symposia celebrating the work of our staff and students.

At our most recent external appraisal, the College received the following commendations at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) Periodic Review held in February 2022^{xxv}:

- Good level of research active staff in all areas, projects being used to inform TLA. Employers and professionals from sectors were brought in for networking opportunities and delivering lectures, masterclasses and workshops.
- HE teaching staff contracts which provide opportunity and time for staff to engage with research and scholarly activity.
- Teams are supported to engage in research and scholarship and there appears to be a high level of engagement across all subjects. This is being used to inform TLA.

Curriculum delivery is supported by the provision of an appropriate and well-resourced learning environment, including a HE Library and Resource Centre (LRC), a dedicated team of Academic Development Lecturers based in the Academic Success Centre (ASC), a Graduate Hub which hosts a Career and Employability Service (CES) as well as the provision of course-specific equipment and spaces. All students undertake an embedded Academic Skills programme in their first semester, resulting in every student in the first year of their course understanding the expectations and academic requirements of HE study. Through this process students are supported in their transition into HE and are provided with essential knowledge regarding learning, teaching and assessment as well as the core academic skills required to succeed.

Our Academic Success Centre, staffed by Academic Development Lecturers, provides space and opportunity for students to develop their academic skills throughout their studies. The ASC offers a range of activities and resources including: a) a Peer-Assisted Learning scheme; b) one to one tutorial; c) workshops; d) an Academic English course for second-language speakers; e) an Academic writing course, f) Academic Development Guides and a range of other self-access learning resources; and g) tailor-made workshops. The range of development opportunities is flexible and inclusive in order to cater for the diverse student population. The Academic Development Lecturers also deliver a dynamic programme of in-curriculum workshops and extra-curricular activities for students, alongside offering individual and small group tutorials, such as: a) Dissertation Workshops to mentor final-year students in the requisite research skills; and b) a series of self-access 'Academic Development Guides' that cover a range of academic skills topics. They also work with course teams to embed subject-specific workshops within the curriculum, particularly

at key transition points. In February 2022, the UCLan Periodic Review Panel commended our Academic Success Centre, with its dedicated team of staff providing academic skills development, as innovative practice. The Panel also commended our dedicated HE spaces which include the Academic Success Centre, as providing opportunities for students to be immersed in academic discussion, research and scholarship which positively impacts on their learning and engagement and reported that we have a very good range of academic skills support for all students to access.^{xxvi}. Examples of student feedback on support which has fostered strong outcomes include:

“The tutors have been more than supportive. The academic development team, especially , are great and have really helped me with understanding how I can improve my writing.” **Education & Early Years BA Year 1, 20/21 Mid-Year Survey**

“I have found...sessions for the academic skills module very helpful, the drop-in sessions at the academic skills hub are very useful also, I feel very supported at UCO” **Children & Young People FdA Year 1, 21/22 Induction Survey**

Our size and shape of provision data, over the four-year aggregate, notes that 25.4% of our full-time students and 9.9% of our part-time students reported a disability. The UCO site has a specialist in-house team which provides support for disabled students, including a HE Disability Officer, a HE Health and Wellbeing Officer, and from September 2021, the team was strengthened by the appointment of a HE Accessibility and Wellbeing Assistant. Guidance and support for disabled students includes; providing assistance through the application for Disabled Student Allowance (DSA), implementing and managing learning support plans; arranging financial support for dyslexia screenings; individual and small group counselling sessions; longer-term monitoring; and advice about managing mental health. In addition, the team provides advice and training to academic and professional staff to promote inclusion and equality, ensuring all staff are confident in supporting students with disabilities. Effective early support for disability, health and wellbeing to identify and acknowledge additional needs is a key focus to ensure that all students are supported to achieve. This involves the capturing of essential data via the application process and providing applicants with advice and guidance in relation to our support services. Individual Learner Support Plans capture key information regarding each student's learning needs, enabling the provision of reasonable adjustments. The HE Disability and Health and Wellbeing provision attests to the College's responsiveness to student need and the aim to support positive outcomes for all. With a number of student withdrawals or suspensions and increased engagement with disability services being prompted by mental health issues, the College invested in dedicated pastoral support for this area. At the heart of this is a dedicated Wellbeing Hub which was first established in October 2021 as a social space for students to access unstructured support throughout their student journey. The Wellbeing Hub, staffed by our Accessibility and Wellbeing Assistant, is where students can access immediate support, book appointments for specialist support, and have a place of safety if in crisis. The space was designed to be adaptable for different student needs, with an accessible kitchen, seating and independent study options available in the room. Additionally, the room can be transformed into a sensory space to cater for students with both low and high stimulus needs in regard to sensory processing.

The HE Disability and Health and Wellbeing team also offer therapeutic based support and interventions to promote good mental health and wellbeing. The service works closely with external agencies such as [Healthy Minds](#) and [TOG Mind](#) to ensure that holistic support is delivered. A range of 1:1 sessions based around student needs include person-centred therapy based reflective sessions; arts therapy based creative sessions; informal sensory input sessions; CPD therapy based goal driven sessions; and person-centred therapy based talking sessions. Staff have

specialist training as Mental Health First Aiders and Trauma Informed Practitioners, and also deliver tutorial sessions as part of the HE Tutorial Scheme^{xxvii} (articulated further in the Student Outcomes section) which include Wellbeing Workshops on Managing your own Mental Health; Self-care and Independence; Managing Stress; Motivation and Confidence; Creative therapeutic approaches (with Trauma Informed approaches); Mindfulness; Sleep and Wellbeing; and Isolation and Loneliness. The team develop and run social events and groups for students and work with the wider HE teams to develop online resources. The dedicated HE Health and Wellbeing Officer provides counselling, mental health and general wellbeing support for our students, delivered in curriculum as well as one-to-one sessions. Students can access various different groups including a daily Breakfast Club, a weekly Mindfulness Group, a weekly Wellbeing Hour, and the team arrange Equality and Diversity events throughout the year. The Wellbeing Hub is also used as the first point of contact for welfare issues, where students can access support via [Oldham Foodbank](#), [Sexual Health Hub](#), [housing signposting](#), and clothing for job interviews ([Working Wardrobe](#)).

In addition to the professional support available, all HE students are allocated a Personal Tutor, who is an academic within their course team. A structured scheme of pastoral support is embedded in curriculum delivery through individual tutorials. Throughout their studies all students will encounter a personalised learning experience made to respond to their individual needs and enable them to succeed. The HE Personal Tutoring Procedure recognises the NUS and their policies around student Mental Health and Wellbeing and personal tutoring (2020). The Personal Tutor works with the student throughout their journey and will meet with them on a regular basis to assist progression and success on their course.^{xxviii}

The College received the following commendations at the Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) Periodic Review held in February 2019^{xxix}:

- The way in which the College facilitates students to realise their full potential, via academic, study skills and pastoral support.
- How the courses within the partnership scaffold information and academic skills around the provision across academic levels 4-6, encouraging students to become independent learners.

This is further supported by the feedback we receive from our students, for example: *“At UCO I finally feel like I am doing well. I have struggled through out my academic life... I am finally growing in confidence with my abilities here as a preparatory first year. Everything is made clear instruction wise, I am not afraid to ask for help or support when I need it, and as a result it seems that I am finally doing well... through the support received, I have been able to apply for things I wouldn't have had the opportunity to do in school or college such as becoming Student Representative and a PASS leader, all whilst doing a course that I thoroughly enjoy”* **with**

Foundation Year, the 2020/21 Student Induction survey

A dedicated HE library is available for students to discuss, explore and develop the level of sustainability for their study. The highly qualified and dedicated team provide a stimulating HE environment where resources can be shared and explored, and offer workshops around research, digital literacies and other essential elements for successful study throughout the academic year. The HE online catalogue, e-Databases (over 14,000 full text articles and e-Books) and VLE enable students to search for learning materials both on and off-campus. Partnership resources are also promoted within the LRC induction process and on the VLE. The LRC also works with RNIB to ensure that where possible, resources are available in accessible formats and relevant students are inducted onto the RNIB BookShare Database. The LRC utilises a ratio model for all new acquisitions with a standard of 1:7 for core and 1:20 for indicative reading.

In 2021/22, the College was awarded a Mixed Economy Group (MEG) Small Scale Bursary, to undertake a research project 'exploring the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on HE students' use of the UCO Learning Resource Centre'^{xxx}. The research investigated the impact of moving to distance learning and online resource access that students experienced during the COVID-19 state lockdowns and partial re-openings. The report juxtaposes the experience of using physical and online teaching and learning resources both during and after the lockdowns. The research was conducted primarily to assist the LRC staff in encouraging students back into the space; and supporting and developing students' research and studying techniques; as there is a direct correlation between our students using library resources and academic success. The research explored students' experiences of using the LRC and themes and trends were identified from an online survey and two focus groups. The conclusions informed recommendations to improve the physical environment, digital resources, and online pedagogy. Consulting students had great value as we were able to gain a snapshot of the past, present, and capture ideas for the future. We were able to identify good practices that were developed during the pandemic such as staff support, and discuss areas which require improvement (for example, online teaching, the physical and online spaces that students utilise, and available technologies). The research provided useful recommendations and insights to inform our practice and potentially share with other College HE Library and Resource Centres nationally through the MEG forum. The headline recommendations from the research that will inform the practices to enhance the student experience are; improve and develop digital and technological resources, enhancement of hybrid learning, development of the physical space, and enhancement of triangulated approach of student/academic support with the Academic Success and Wellbeing teams. In conjunction with the HE Senior Management Team, the Library and Resource Centre Team Leader will lead on the implementation of the recommendations. Work has already begun to update the technology in the space, through the update of PCs, and the provision of additional desks which allow students to study and use their own technology.

We are committed to enabling all students to reach and exceed their goals and an integral part of this commitment is to create an ethos of quality enhancement that impacts in a positive and progressive manner on all aspects of the student experience. The College acknowledges that to achieve this there needs to be a partnership between the organisation, staff and students. We listen to our students through a wide range of formal and informal methods, including; our Student Representation system, Staff Student Panels, HE Committees, Personal Tutor Scheme, Surveys, Focus Groups and Student Forum meetings. Through these methods, students have the opportunity to provide feedback on all aspects of their experience, and to be involved in our quality enhancement processes. A dedicated group for Student Experience within our committee structure works in partnership with students, reporting to the Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee. The valued feedback we receive from these methods is incorporated into our Business Planning and review systems and is utilised to help us deliver continuous improvement to our courses and campus services.

The College has developed an appropriate HE committee structure that meets the necessary standard to support the delivery of HE. Student engagement in quality and governance encouraged through the Student Induction Programme, Student Forum meetings and Student Representative system. The Student Experience and Quality Co-Ordinator works with student representatives to raise aspirations and promote membership of the various committees held, with the aim of strengthening the student voice. The Student Forum is a well-established, vibrant, and well attended meeting at which students are able to express their views directly to members of the Professional Services teams and College Principalship. The Student Forum is also complemented

by Staff/Student Panels where students can feed back to their course team on teaching, learning, and assessment. In addition, HE students are offered two opportunities each year to meet with the College Principalship and Governors to provide feedback. Themes identified from all methods are reported to the HE Curriculum, Quality and Standards Committee to review actions and impact, and implement or escalate recommendations. Examples of improvements made directly from student feedback are; continued investment in IT resources, including new PCs and equipment, new projectors in classrooms, the introduction of two new online conferencing classrooms to support blended teaching delivery, introduction of a new VLE, increased number of laptops available for student loan, improved access to online resources, delivery of a variety of workshops and sessions provided by the Academic Development Lecturers, appointment of an ESOL Tutor to provide additional support for second language speakers, improvements made to the catering service on campus, and the appointment of additional staff in the Wellbeing team.

3. Student Outcomes

In order to deliver our commitment to the students, the College has developed inclusive support services (as articulated in section 2). The Academic Success service, available to all HE students via the Academic Success Centre, is based on a principle of academic development for all, rather than remedial intervention for weaker students. It supports transition and progression between levels, aspiration for excellence, and an ethos of development for all students, regardless of their academic background, experience and abilities.

A central HE Tutorial Scheme and calendar, comprising of individual and group tutorials, is produced each year which embeds the ASC activities and other support activities. This model ensures that each student receives personalised support to promote optimum, continuation, completion and progression. The model pinpoints the key periods of the student journey and ensures all first-year students have a 'right choice' tutorial within the first five weeks of study and that all final-year students (Foundation and Honours Degree) undertake an 'Exit/Progression' tutorial in the second semester. Accompanying this structured support, all staff are available on campus at specified times throughout the week and meet with students on a further ad hoc basis. These verbal interactions facilitate formative feedback that supports student progress and achievement; the ability to access formative feedback on assessment is embedded through course design and supported by the provision of Academic Development Lecturers who are accessible to all students on a one-to-one basis beyond their timetabled curriculum hours. With all feedback being recorded on our student analytics database (MyCAP) we can build a holistic profile of every student's engagement and progress with their studies. The effectiveness of this model can be seen in our continuation and completion metrics. The UCLan Periodic Review Panel stated that: "[s]tudent support and guidance is extensive and can be adjusted to suit the needs of individuals. Support staff work in alignment with the course team so that all those who need to know about a student's circumstances do"^{xxxxi}.

Another contributory factor to the outstanding quality of continuation and completion data is the deployment of a HE-specific risk register that ensures all students who are deemed at-risk for either academic or personal reasons are engaged with and supported so that they are able to continue their HE studies. The central database system for course and student monitoring ensures that critical success factors like attendance and engagement are regularly reviewed and responded to appropriately by course teams and that the HE Senior Management Team and wider College Principalship are aware of the key performance data in areas such as attendance, retention and achievement. Our At-Risk Register is monitored and updated on a weekly basis, providing a live picture of student engagement with their studies through the various points of contact or

engagement with academic and professional staff. Working collaboratively, academic and professional services teams can implement early triaging and intervention to support our students. Continuous analysis of the key aspects is necessary to enable support services and course teams to prioritise effective interventions for the more pressing issues. The positive impact of these systems can be seen in the year-on-year improvements of our OfS TEF continuation data for full time students which has risen year on year:

Time Series (Full Time)	Continuation %	Benchmark	+ / -
Year 1	81.2	81.8	- 0.6
Year 2	83.8	82.6	+ 1.2
Year 3	85.6	82.6	+ 3
Year 4	85.8	84.5	+ 1.3

Our continuation and completion data are extremely strong and features of outstanding quality, particularly when set against the backdrop of the provider context. An analysis of the OfS TEF data shows that continuation rates are weaker for part time students in year 3 (2017/18 Entrants) and part time males. Completions rates are also not as strong for part time students. In recognition of this, we have implemented actions to mitigate against the attrition of part time students. Academic Development Lecturers are available in the evenings to support students, alongside the LRC extending its manned opening hours. This is in conjunction with the HE Student Induction Procedure, which ensures that part time evening and weekend students have a rigorous induction to support them.

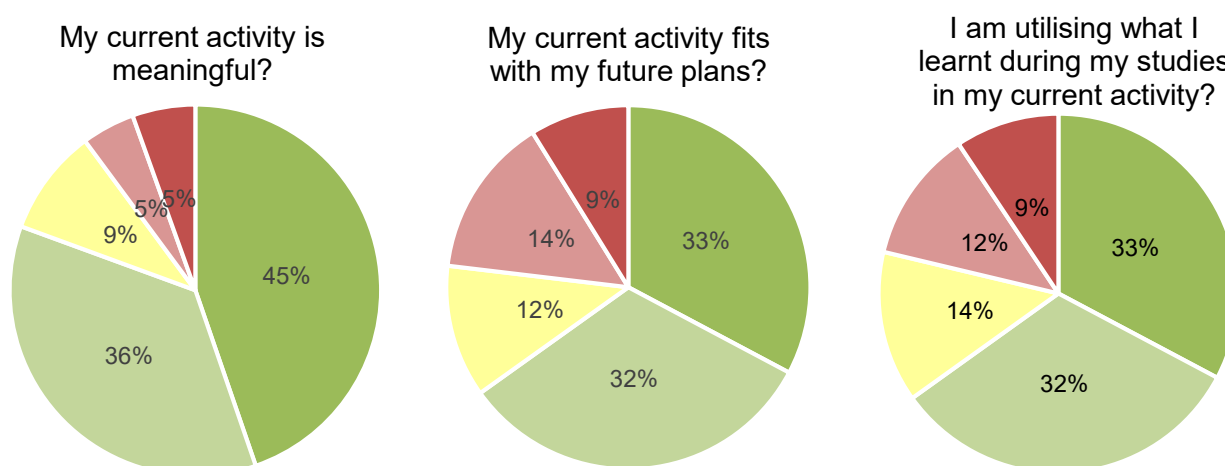
Graduate Outcomes

Reviewing the data collected from the 3 years of Graduate Outcomes, for our undergraduate courses, the percentage of our graduates with a positive outcome (students who report in their response to the Graduate Outcomes survey, 15 months after gaining their qualification, that they were; working in a managerial or professional employment, defined as employment in an occupation which falls within major groups 1 to 3 of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Standard Occupational Classification 2020, were engaged in further study, or were travelling, caring for someone else or retired) is 53% (136 of 258) for those graduating from full time study and 70% (19 of 27) for those graduating from part-time study. Over the three years of Graduate Outcomes data received, for our graduates from undergraduate courses who had noted work as an activity, 44% were in highly skilled roles, 34% in medium skilled roles, and 22% in low skilled roles (defined by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Standard Occupational Classification 2020) ^{xxxii}. With the majority demographic of our students being mature females from the immediate locality, many of whom have families, caring responsibilities, and other work obligations throughout their studies, tend to decide to join the College so they are able to study locally, alongside their other commitments. Following completion of their course, the majority then choose to search for employment locally too. This is supported by our Graduate Outcomes data, with our results also showing that our graduates enter professions related to their subject area. However, as our current curriculum is designed around the need of the local and regional areas, roles within some of these sectors tend to be medium skilled, rather than high skilled, with lower starting salaries (e.g. the industries of Health and Social Care, Early Years, Children and Young People, and Creative subjects). This, coupled with a low volume of professional and managerial roles in the immediate labour market, has an impact on all of our graduates. One of the findings of the [Oldham Economic Review Board](#) was that “up to 70% of current employment in Oldham is within the “foundational economy” (mainly, but not exclusively public sector).” The longer-term benefits of our students

undertaking a course in higher education will be evident for their families, in terms of employment. This will also have a wider impact, with many of our graduates becoming role models within their families, and will help to ensure that their children, influenced by parental education, have a higher chance of aspiring to attend higher education themselves, and ultimately gain higher paid roles. One student noted *“I had a 10-year gap out of education, and came back to study when both my children were young. I believe UCO has been the best place for me to study as a student who is a mother. This course has allowed me to go onto further studies and I am now training to become a teacher. My daughters have grown up knowing their Mum is in education and I believe this will better their future by understanding the value of university when they leave school.”*

2021-22 Graduate, received via email

Over the three years of Graduate Outcomes data received, for those students from our undergraduate courses who responded to the subjective wellbeing questions, a total of 81% of our graduates surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that their current activity was meaningful, 65% agreed or strongly agreed that their current activity fitted with their future plans, and 65% agreed or strongly agreed that they were utilising what they had learnt during their studies.



Also, for graduates who noted they were in employment at the time of census, when asked *“Did you need the qualification that you completed 15 months ago to get the job?”*, 47% of graduates from full-time courses, and 77% of graduates from part-time courses, replied yes, their undergraduate qualification was either a formal requirement, or gave them an advantage. Our provider data notes that 12.1% (of which 7.7% is significant) of our graduates who received a negative outcome had noted interim study in the period between completion of their course and the census week, compared to an average of 4.8% (of which 3.2% is significant) across all OfS registered providers. This is expected due to the design of our curriculum, with FdA / Top-up models used across our provision, accounting for the majority of undergraduate student intake in two of the three census years.^{xxxiii}

	Foundation Degree (FdA)	Honours Degree	HNC
2017/18	38%	57%	5%
2018/19	50%	48%	2%
2019/20	54%	35%	11%

Progression to Top-up following successful completion of a Foundation Degree, or progression to postgraduate study following an Honours Degree, for the same three years was high; 77% in 2017/18, 92% in 2018/19, and 87% in 2019/20. Over the three years, of students eligible to undertake

the Graduate Outcomes survey, 30% had undertaken interim study at the College alone. In addition to this, graduates accessed further study at other providers. This has resulted in nearly a third of our students being given opportunity to complete the Graduate Outcomes survey three months after completing their most recent study, rather than 15 months at the time of census, increasing the chance that they would at this point receive a negative outcome, compared to their peers who had an additional year to find a highly skilled role.^{xxxiv}

Educational Gains

In line with the HE TLA Strategy and the current strong drive for providers to equip students with a plethora of transferable skills to facilitate their journey into industry, we have adopted and embedded an Applied Learning Model at every level. This allows students to put theory into practise and to develop the key skills required to progress into a graduate role within a range of industries. The model focuses on the following:

1 Graduate Attributes

Our goal is to develop holistically rounded graduates who can compete in the labour market to find jobs they love, acknowledging that this is often outside of the field of the students' degree subject. To do this, we have developed a Graduate Attributes Framework; students will be able to access and apply these attributes to the challenges in their lives, to finding meaningful employment, to the workplace and holistically in their wider personal development.

2 Skills & Qualities

Our Core Skills Framework outlines the skills which we expect students to develop during their studies to enable them to be successful in progressing to graduate-level roles in a range of fields both related and unrelated to their degree subject; resilience, communication, leadership, commercial awareness, working with others, self-awareness & emotional intelligence, self-motivation & initiative, career management, digital & technical, planning, organisation & time management.

3 Placements and Projects

To align with and strive towards achieving and maintaining the highest levels of best practice and standards, we require each HE course to adopt either a Placement, Project or Research option. The Applied Learning Model on BA (Hons) Graphic Design has been introduced at Level 4 through a collaborative project developed in conjunction with Blackpool & The Fylde College - 'Life in a Northern Town' is a collection of visual narratives based on individual experiences and perspectives of living in 'the North' and explores what it means to be 'Northern'. The project is intended to run over a three-year period culminating in a book and exhibition. At Level 5, industry competitions are encouraged within the curriculum, with students preparing submissions for the Penguin Student Awards. This is developed further at Level 6, through the External Project module, which requires students to respond to an industry led brief devised by international awarding organisations D&AD (New Blood Awards) and Creative Conscience.

Within our BSc (Hons) Psychology course, all modules include transferrable skills, such as communication, collaboration, research skills and planning, time management and organisation. Self-awareness, emotional intelligence and self-motivation are all developed through reflective practice and research ethics. The level 5 Applying Psychology module allows the students to put theory into practise and to develop the key skills required to progress into a graduate role. The students are required to work in groups with an external agency and develop a solution to a problem. The students also reflect on the employability skills they have used during the project and how they will use these skills in the future.

In line with the HE Applied Learning Model, a key strength of the BA (Hons) Education and Early Years (EEY) course is the industry links which are embedded within all modules, supported by placement practice in early years education settings throughout the duration of their course. Level 4 and 5 students undertake 240 hours of assessed professional placements in a high-quality setting, (students are not placed in settings Ofsted designate as 'requiring improvement' 'Inadequate' or newly registered settings who have not yet had their first graded inspection, as the quality for that setting is unknown), with a placement mentor to support professional development during this time. Level 6 students undertake a research placement which totals at least 150 hours throughout the year. All students must change their professional placement for levels 5 and 6 to enable them to experience a range of high-quality settings, increasing their CV experience/employability prospects and ensuring they have had different experiences in a range of quality settings. Tutors have extensive industry experience as primary teachers, early years educators and through strategic roles within local authorities in children's workforce development, are able to support students to make critical links between theory and practice. As such, students thrive in placements, and are given the opportunity to see and embed lecture content and theory into practice, alongside their course. Where this did not take place during the national lockdown, there were noticeable gaps in understanding, whereby students had not fully grasped theories of aspects of professional practice as they had not had an opportunity to see and experience them. It is evident that simulated experiences are no substitute for the world of work.

During academic year 2020/21, the course team developed a new non-compulsory 'Specialised Placement' aspect to the Professional Practice 2 module, in which students who had undertaken their 240 hours of practice in an educational setting were encouraged to also spend 2-3 weeks in an alternate placement working with children and families outside of a classroom role. This was designed to make use of the time between March and June whereby most level 5 students had completed placement hours. The Specialised Placement was designed to raise student aspirations and career goals beyond a mainstream primary setting. The pandemic prevented this from going ahead in 2020/21 but was undertaken with huge success in 2021/22. Students successfully gained roles for 2-3 weeks in placements such as Forest Schools, pastoral safeguarding roles, working with children at Key Stage 2, 3 and 4, within a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU), SEND schools, Faith Schools, and Charity based roles, Speech and Language roles. The impact of this educational gain can be evidenced by two students who gained experience in a Forest School and a PRU and have now chosen subjects in relation to this experience for their Major Study module as a direct result of their specialised placement. One student firmly decided her career after graduation would be working with children in a PRU. The Education and Early Years students also have a 100% success rate in applying for primary teaching; in the last 3 academic years, every student who has applied for PGCE primary teaching has been accepted by a variety of institutions and School centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) providers Greater Manchester.

One of the biggest concerns for many students engaging on a Counselling degree, is their ability to secure a placement and accrue 100 practice hours. Since the pandemic, many placements have moved to online-only provision, which limits student's experiences of face-to-face counselling. This online-only practice also raises a concern for student's joining professional bodies, as the BACP currently require that at least 51 of the 100 practice hours, must be carried out face-to-face. In order to help students to meet this placement demand, we have worked collaboratively with the Further Education Wellbeing, Safeguarding and Senior Leadership team at the College to establish a counselling provision for their students. This innovative project would not only increase mental health provision for our Further Education students, but also create face-to-face placement

opportunities for the Counselling and Psychotherapeutic Skills students. It is hoped that once this service is fully operational, all students who would like to seek counselling will be provided with at least 8 sessions, with the possibility to extend to 12 if necessary. This service will also allow the students to gain experience of working with a wide range of mental health issues, within their local community. Having experience of working with 16-18-year olds, as well as adults, will greatly develop their employability profile.

Positive student feedback has been acquired on student outcomes from the NSS which includes:

"I have learned a lot since I have started my health and social care course, and have gained a lot of confidence and knowledge from my placement." **Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care NSS 2021**

"I have been able to link my learning with my current working role, this has enhanced my understanding and am currently applying for a management position." **FdA in Children and Young People NSS 2022**

The UCLan Periodic Review Panel^{xxxv} supports our assertions by reporting that "[a]ll courses outline the engagement with employers through guest speakers, masterclasses, workshops and... teaching staff still being active in their subject area".

Oldham, as a borough, has a range of challenges facing it in terms of providing higher level employment for our graduates and these have been explored through the [Oldham Economic Review Board](#). As highlighted in the context section, Oldham's main challenge is a lack of economic purpose following the de-industrialisation and collapse of cotton and engineering industries, which has seen a decline in the relative levels of wealth within the borough. This has had a direct impact on other issues within Oldham – such as its high streets, its institutions and its social fabric. There will not be a complete substitution of previously strong sectors and institutions with new ones with a similar reach and impact. The future economy and labour market in Oldham (and Greater Manchester) is likely to be more diverse in its sectors, occupations and types of jobs and firms than in the past^{xxxvi}.

Anecdotally, students cite confidence and a lack of opportunity as the two main challenges holding them back from entering high level employment. In order to tackle these challenges, we have an in-house Career and Employability Service, which has been awarded the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services Membership Quality Standard, to support students towards positive graduate outcomes. Due to the size of the institution the Career and Employability Service consists of one Level 6 Qualified Career and Graduate Outcomes Officer (CGO) who possesses a Post Graduate Diploma in Career Guidance. The service is based in our dedicated Graduate Hub, which gives students space to discuss career options and to research job roles with the support of our CGO. The space has recently been updated with new PC's to give students the opportunity to independently search for career related information and postgraduate study options. Within the space, students can access one to one support in addition to workshops aimed at improving skills and job readiness. Workshops can be booked through course teams so that they can be tailored to specific, course related career options and to ensure that students are aware of the expectations when applying for jobs in different fields. The Graduate Hub is also where students can access the 'Job Shop Drop In' over summer as well as being the hub for alumni access to career support for up to three years after graduation.

There is an ongoing challenge regarding quality of destination statistics due to low response rates to the Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS). Improvements have been made to alumni sign up, which enables continued relationships with alumni and therefore an opportunity to promote completion of

the survey, however, impact will not be seen until this year's cohort completes the survey in November 2023. Student feedback, acquired by the CGO, demonstrates that students have a lack of confidence in applying for and securing higher level roles, which in turn is reflected in service delivery, for example the embedding of Graduate Attributes (Applied Learning Model) and how to build and evidence them. In 2021/22 Graduate Attributes awareness raising sessions were delivered across all year groups by the CGO.

The size of the institution is a real strength when looking at how the needs and perspectives of our students inform the development of the service as we are able to be incredibly responsive. The delivery of employability is tailored to each course through HE tutorials and in addition to compulsory sessions on Graduate Attributes, academic staff have access to a menu of workshops that can be delivered to suit the needs of their students, which include practical support on CV, applications and interviews, to sessions that strengthen mindset and time management. The CGO is also able to quickly respond to the needs of a particular course throughout the year and this has led to more ad hoc sessions being delivered to meet a specific need, for example an Elevator Pitch session to Criminology Year 3 students who were presenting their dissertation proposals. The CGO attends the Student Forum that meets four times a year and is on hand to gather and respond to feedback, for example when students fed back the need for support in finding a placement the CGO developed a *How to Get a Placement* workshop.

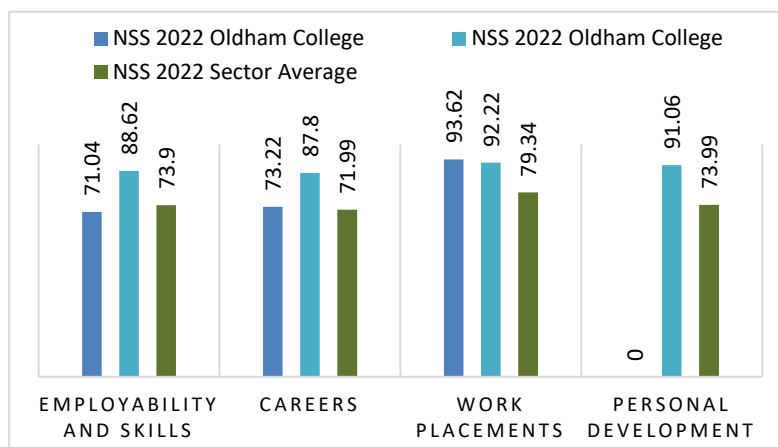
Again, the size of the institution is advantageous when driving engagement with the service as the CGO is visible and accessible. Seventy-four workshops were delivered in 2021/22 across the faculties (an increase of 13 from 2020/21), and this increased the number of students accessing one-to-one appointments. There has been a year-on-year increase both in terms of appointments delivered and individual students seen. In 2020/21, 189 appointments were delivered, rising to 320 in 2021/22. In 2020/21 47 individual students were seen, rising to 83 in 2021/22. We are also seeing an increase in alumni engagement with registrations increasing from 67 in 2021 to 106 in 2022. Alumni registration includes permission to keep in contact which means we can find out anecdotal information about the roles our students secure and our graduands can continue to access support from the CGO in order to secure higher level roles when they have built experience.^{xxxvii}

A key feature of both the Oldham College Strategic Plan and HE TLA Strategy is ensuring that our curriculum offer aligns with trends and predictions in the world of work. A mapping exercise between FE and HE provision at our institution takes place annually. This includes a rigorous review of Labour Market Intelligence to inform curriculum development and design work, ensuring that our offer meets the skills needs of Oldham and the wider City Region and provides the progressions pathways needed for our residents and students to get into work. Many of our Course Leaders foster industry relationships and use these to make employability relevant and up to date in their curriculum. Staff use their own training to share expertise, an example of which being our Disability Officer delivering sessions to Early Years and Children and Young People students regarding Trauma Informed practice and how it relates to the sectors they will work in. Research projects from staff and students also explore key themes that can be linked to labour market information, for example our Early Years course tutor undertook a research project around Forest Schools which was shared at our annual Research Symposium. In turn this will develop the students' knowledge of alternative opportunities within the sector.

Evidence of outstanding quality and the impact of the Career and Employability Service is demonstrated in the feedback which has been gathered through the NSS Optional Question Banks^{xxxviii}. The data demonstrates ratings which are significantly above the sector average for areas related to employability.

In February 2022, UCLan Periodic Review Panel^{xxxix} commended the service and recognised that “[a]cross the whole curriculum there is a good programme of employability led by the dedicated careers team for HE students and a Graduate Hub with resources for graduate career guidance”^{xl}.

Our 2021/22 annual Course Evaluation Questionnaire was sent to



all 482 of our students and 51% responded. Overall, 96% of students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “*I feel I have developed skills useful for my future (for work / further study)*”. To inform development of our onsite Career and Employability service the following open text question was asked; *Is there anything you feel may hold you back from being successful, in either work or further study, after you finish your course?* It is positive to note that the majority of students responded that they were confident they would succeed, leaving comments such as: “*Nothing really will hold me back, the knowledge and skills I had acquired from UCO has given me good motivation to aim for post graduate course after the completion. The support I got from the UCO is so brilliant*”; and “*I feel there will be no holding me back due to the outstanding support I have received from my course tutor, he has inspired me to follow my future goals and develop on my skills to achieve the desired outcome. I have reflected and acted on feedback and I have developed in confidence and developed self-belief and I want to thank my tutors for their support.*”

Employability Week, held once a year, is facilitated by the CGO and features an ‘Employer Market Place’ where students are given the chance to network with local and national employers to enhance their knowledge of graduate level roles once they have completed their studies. Academic staff also arrange subject specific sessions using their industry links, available to all students if they would like further information on a different career pathway. Employability Week also includes showcasing of volunteering opportunities which students can access whilst studying, to develop their employability skills and ‘work readiness’. Finally, local Institutions are invited to discuss further study options. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, Employability Week ran virtually, leading to students being able to meet with national employers more readily than if constrained to face to face interaction. This has led to a ‘Employability Rewind’ feature being available to all students during the event and leading to improved accessibility. Employers who took part in events also gave positive feedback and felt working with the College was beneficial to their businesses and improved employer engagement;

“Lots of enthusiastic students - there was a good number of people, and the overall atmosphere was very welcoming.” **The Princes Trust**

“Lots of interesting conversations took place between myself and the students... excellent opportunity for me to raise awareness of Recessive Inheritance and Genetic Services.” **Oldham Genetic Services**

In order to achieve the commitment to our students, “to develop graduates who are driven, and ambitious individuals equipped for industry, with the autonomy and capacity to think critically and take responsibility for their own lifelong learning, personal and professional development”^{xlii}, each academic year the second year BA (Hons) Business Management students are provided with the opportunity to engage in the [Young Enterprise Start-Up](#) programme. This is the ultimate

employability and entrepreneurship experience which gives HE students the opportunity to develop employability skills and prepare for the world of work. The programme believes in learning by doing, whereby Start-Up participants set up and run their own student company for up to 12 months. Young Enterprise (YE) works with thousands of businesses nationally, both large and small. The industry supporters advise and support the students on Start-Up. This bringing together of industry and education offers genuine networking opportunities for our students.

As part of the programme students set up and run a company from start to end, they are provided with access to the YE dedicated digital platform and access to YE Trading Station (an e-commerce platform). They can participate in competitions and celebration events (locally, regionally, nationally and up to European level), have opportunities to participate in trade fairs, and will receive a personalised certificate evidencing progression of employability skills. This initiative/competition is incorporated into the level 5 Enterprise and Employability module. Employers co-deliver the module on topics such as *'what are employers looking for?'* or *'what does initiative mean at work?'* The module aims to develop the student's long-term employability by ensuring they develop transferable enterprise skills and undertake suitable work-based experience and/or engage in quality freelance work during their programme of study. Students apply key aspects of knowledge and understanding, and develop personal and professional skills within a work-based setting. A work-based project which will involve a minimum of 60 hours of industry-relevant paid or voluntary work experience. In addition, students will study and apply approaches to planning and developing their own business, in order to develop their knowledge of entrepreneurial opportunities and important transferable skills in enterprise and innovation.

In terms of impact, the competitions, as part of the Start Up Programme, have increased creativity and innovation as it created the impetus for students to think outside of the box as they are competing with many other HE providers and the competition has proven to be very tough. The students have been trained to present and communicate amongst hundreds of people and engage in dialogue with employers, this has developed methods of articulation and improved their communication skills. The students demonstrated that they could collaborate with businesses to test their concepts and engage in market research to test feasibility. In 2020/21 a group of our BA (Hons) Business Management students worked on a concept based on a company that would take a certain percentage of profits from a local company and give it to charity. This group won the YE Award for Digital Excellence. In 2021/22 a group concept was to develop an app to bring businesses from local areas together to trade as a market. One of the students won the YE Student of the Year award.

In February 2022, one of our BA (Hons) Business Management students, _____ (who was part of the group who won the YE Award for Digital Excellence in 2020/21), won the 2021/22

_____ is an inspiring example of what an individual can achieve with the right attitude, self-determination and ambition. _____ had an EHCP throughout previous education, but grew beyond measure in personal and academic confidence, making almost no use of additional learning support towards the end of his studies. _____ has become an advocate to future students, using his own diversity to show that neuro-diversity conditions do not need to be a barrier to success. After winning the award, _____ stated that *"I mainly just use academic support now and am more independent since becoming a student representative for my class with extra responsibilities. This is my final year of study, so next I'm hoping to go into employment in the business and management field...I want to thank my mum and dad...and the staff here for all the support I've had to make this possible."*^{xlii} _____ went on to achieve a First Class Honours Degree.

Our annual Graduation Ceremony captures the spirit of the College and the important place it plays in the lives of our students, but also the Oldham community. Each year graduating students join academic staff and guests from partner institutions, the local council and community, to process through the town centre. While this is an opportunity for us to celebrate with pride the achievements of our students, it is also a celebration for the town and an opportunity to raise the aspirations of the local community in relation to higher level study and skills in an area in which qualifications at NVQ 4 or above fall far below the national average.

The College prides itself on delivering high quality provision that achieves excellent outcomes for its students, furnishing them with the skills, attributes and the self-belief required to progress through their degree and into employment or further study that is appropriate and fulfils their aspirations. Our culture of continuous improvement and aspiring for excellence permeates every aspect of the institution, and the vibrant, collegial and inspirational passion of staff and students enables the development of skills and knowledge fit for the future and fit for the Oldham community.

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