Provider name: Colchester Institute
UKPRN: 10001535

TEF 2023 Submission

1. Provider context

1.1 Provider portrait

Colchester Institute's history goes back to 1885 when The Albert School of Art and Design opened on Colchester's High Street. By 1912 it had moved to North Hill and then in 1954 the first buildings of the North-East Essex Technical College and School of Art opened at Sheepen Road, our current location.

By 1976 the College had merged with the St Osyth College of Education to be come Colchester Institute, now operating on two campuses in Colchester and Clacton. Since then, Colchester Institute merged with Braintree College in 2010. As of 2021, Colchester Institutes operates on two campuses in Colchester and Braintree, providing Further and Higher Education programmes.

The QSRMI review in November 2019 describes the management structure of our provision as follows:

'University Centre Colchester […] is the higher education delivery arm of Colchester Institute in partnership with the University of Essex, University of East Anglia, University of Huddersfield and Pearson. The [College] is led by an executive team consisting of the Principal and Chief Executive, two Executive Vice Principals and two Vice Principals. [UCC] is headed by the Dean of Higher Education, who reports to the Executive Vice Principal (Curriculum, Planning and Quality). The Dean of Higher Education line manages [three] Heads of School and the Head of [UCC] Academic Services.[1]

University Centre Colchester (UCC) was established as a brand in 2016 under the auspices of the then Department for Business, Industries and Skills (BIS), to group together the higher education provision at Colchester Institute, in order to provide a more academically and administratively bespoke environment for L4 to L7 programmes. Having delivered Higher Education for over half a century, the institution now offers a range of degree courses in three overarching areas: the Arts, Social Sciences and Applied Technologies. The following figures contextualise some aspects of the student experience at UCC in 2018/19:[2]

- In 2018/19, 187 students enrolled in Yr.1 of whom c.20% progressed to UCC, having previously gained L3 qualifications at Colchester Institute.

- Over 70% of all students are commuter students who live in a radius of up to 25 miles around Colchester.

- Almost 65% of students are over the age of 24 when commencing their studies at UCC.

- An average class size is around 8-12 students. The largest cohorts have c.26 students.

Colchester Institute is an inclusive institution. Its geographical location is relatively close to some of England's most socio-economically disadvantaged communities. England's Indices of Deprivation identifies many of the postcodes from which UCC recruits, as belonging to the 20% most deprived neighbourhoods in the country.[3]

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[1] See: QSRMI report 2019, p.5
[2] See: Colchester Institute, Access and Participation plan 2021-2025, p.1
[3] See: Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2019). The English Indices of deprivation 2019. Postcode used: CO3 3LL

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On the other hand, Colchester is also amongst the ten fastest growing communities in the country.[4]

The University Centre Colchester building is based on the same campus as Colchester Institute. Since 2012, the majority of the HE provision is taught in this designated HE building, with the exception of programmes requiring access to specialist spaces and resources. These include all Arts programmes and some Construction and Engineering provision. UCC's courses are primarily vocational programmes.

1.2 Information about our educational mission and strategic aims

University Centre Colchester's Strategic Plan 2021-2024 is aligned to Colchester Institute's strategy documentation. Our mission, vision and aims underline a commitment to the value and impact of education, our regional focus as an enabler of social mobility and economic development, and our commitment to doing what we do with integrity and to a high standard.

UCC's Strategic Plan makes a commitment to three stands: curriculum innovation; people; and the environment. The following wording is taken from UCC's Strategic Plan 2021-2024:

'Our mission: *Higher Education can change lives. UCC's purpose is to develop students' personal qualities and academic /professional skills, and to enable them to advance their careers through evaluating what they do.*

Our vision: *By 2024 UCC will have further enhanced its reputation as an established provider of higher education in the Eastern region by having repositioned its curriculum offer in line with the needs of the community it serves.*

Our Values: *It is important to us that we are*

- *people-focused – with students and staff at the centre of our priorities and decisions;*
- *inclusive and fair - to students and staff of all backgrounds, origins, abilities, beliefs and orientations;*
- *ambitious – in our expectations of individuals and the wider UCC community;*
- *collaborative – in the way we work with each other;*
- *open and honest – acting with responsibility, transparency and integrity;*
- *respected – as an employer that values, supports and develops staff*

To achieve this we will focus on three key areas: curriculum innovation, people and impact.

Curriculum Innovation. *By 2024 we will:*

- *Focus the majority of our course offer on the following areas: community, industry and creative technologies;*
- *Maximise on student opportunities and staff expertise by replacing the traditional focus on three-year degrees with qualifications relevant to each subject area;*
- *Align the nature of qualifications on offer with the professional demand in each discipline;*
- *Adopt approaches to curriculum content and delivery that reflect the evolving nature of the industries concerned.*

People. *By 2024 we will:*

- *Enable students to switch between synchronous on-campus and off-campus learning wherever possible;*
- *Enrich the student experience through employing more diverse staff expertise, some of whom may work in other areas of the UK or abroad;*

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[4] Source: Lambert Smith Hampton (2019). Vitality index 2019.

- *Support staff in their pursuit of professional practice, as linked to UCC's subject areas.*

***Impact.** By 2024 we will:*

- *Connect UCC's identity and reputation with the clearly defined subjects it provides;*
- *Improve the usage of on-campus spaces for Higher Education through establishing high quality, UCC-wide resources for students;*
- *Be known in the Eastern region for bespoke student-centred, flexible teaching & learning.*[5]

1.3 Information about the size and shape of the provision

A comparison with the size and shape of the provision in 2018 shows that significant institutional changes at UCC during this period.

Table 1. UCC registered students 2018/19 to 2021/22

	2018/19		2019/20		2020/21		2021/22	
UoE	638	53%	522	56%	317	47%	156	27%
UEA	0	0%	52	6%	191	29%	304	53%
Pearson	533	44%	317	34%	125	19%	69	12%
Huddersfield	43	4%	38	4%	36	5%	42	7%
Total	**1214**	**100%**	**929**	**100%**	**669**	**100%**	**571**	**100%**

Overall, the number of students registered with UCC has more than halved between 2018 and 2021 (1214 to 571). The single largest change to the size and shape of the provision has been a carefully managed, gradual reduction of the number of students taught by sub-contractors. In 2018, 38% of UCC students were taught by other organisations. In 2021, only 9% of students were part of the same category.

The following three elements have been central to the reduction in student numbers:

- Teach-out arrangements with subcontractors (476 students in 2018, equating to 38% of all UCC students), but only 50 three years later (9% in 2021)

- Withdrawal of part-time study options at UCC (see item 1.4.3 below). There has been a nation-wide reduction in part-time students, which necessitated the withdrawal of part-time pathways as part-time student cohorts became too small to offer a convincing student experience.

- Teach-out arrangements for some full-time courses (see item 1.4.3 below). A decline in application numbers, especially for Arts programmes, made the retention of the courses listed under 1.4.3 unviable.

However, the reduction in overall student numbers has not impacted negatively on the student outcomes, which have improved over this period as shown in section 3. Students at UCC overwhelmingly value the more personal experience of smaller (but not too small) class sizes, and believe they benefit academically as a result. The institution, too, benefits because of being to able to assist students with a degree of individual academic and pastoral support that is enshrined in our programme specifications and module descriptions, and thus student entitlement.[6]

Since September 2018, we interview every applicant who studies on the UCC campus either in person or online, to ensure that UCC is the right institution for the student, and that staff are

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[5] See: UCC Strategic Plan 2021-2024 at https://www.colchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/UCC-Strategic-Plan-2021-24.pdf

[6] See sample module specifications for L5 Health and Psychosocial Studies at https://www.colchester.ac.uk/course/ba-hons-in-health-and-social-care/#year-2

confident that the student would be enrolling on a programme that is aligned to their aspirations and ambitions. The duty of care we exercise at the point of admission in conjunction with our student support is a central element of UCC's commitment to its students.

As a result of the changes in sub-contracting arrangements as well as overall student numbers, we have seen the re-positioning of percentages within the underrepresented groups in Higher Education at UCC. Although Polar 4 (Quintiles 1 and 2) and disabled student ratios have remained relatively stable, the percentage of students from BAME background has dropped, as has the percentage of mature students.

Table 2. Percentage of underrepresented groups at UCC 2018/19 to 2012/22

	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22
Mature	61%	54%	49%	45%
Disabled	23%	26%	29%	29%
Ethnicity - White	64%	75%	84%	89%
Polar 4 (Quintile 1 & 2)	41%	44%	45%	45%
Care Leaver	0%	0%		

1.4 Other information about the context of the submission

The TEF 2023 process covers the four most recent years of available data for the relevant section at the point of submission. During that time UCC witnessed several fundamental changes that re-positioned its academic offer and thus changed the student experience. These changes are important in understanding the context of the TEF 2023 data and in considering the information included in the present submission.

1.4.1 Change to validating university

In late spring 2017 UCC had a successful institutional re-validation by the University of Essex (UoE). However, by November 2017 UoE announced a change to its strategic priorities in relation to partnerships generally, which effectively placed the validation arrangement with UCC on teach-out arrangements from September 2018 onwards. The last full intake of Essex-registered students was in September 2018.

UCC entered into a new validation agreement with the University of East Anglia, and the first UEA-registered students commenced their studies at UCC in September 2019. Table 2 above outlines the teach-out arrangements between UCC and UoE, and the phasing in of the new validating arrangement with the University of East Anglia (UEA).

One of the consequences of changing validating university for the student experience at UCC was the re-design of programmes that followed the institutional validation by UEA in September 2018. For example, top-up degrees in Engineering and Sports Coaching were introduced, the former with a zero credit bearing bridging module to enable students to re-connect with, and prepare for, academic study, if they had been in out of education for some time, prior to returning to part-time education.

In the School of Social Sciences, all three-year courses were equipped with one module per year that promoted good academic practice alongside the topics studied, effectively building bespoke academic skill development into the programme structure of each subject area. The decision to adopt this approach arose from two key elements: a better understanding of UCC students' prior learning and student feedback itself.

University of Essex registered students had access to UoE's library and other learning resources under the terms of UCC's validation arrangement. This was no longer available to UEA-registered students, which meant that UCC needed to provide more bespoke learning resources for its incoming student population.

1.4.2 Changes to sub-contractual partnerships

One of the biggest changes to student numbers occurred in our registrations with Pearson, which reduced from 533 students in 2018-19 to 69 students in 2021-2022 over a four-year period. (see Table 1). UCC's two sub-contractual partnerships covered Higher National programmes in Sport and in Business & Management. Both partnerships sat in their respective Schools within UCC, and were resourced through a dedicated academic link post, held by a member of staff with subject expertise in either area. Partnership staff were invited to annual staff development days in Colchester, and UCC Heads of Schools conducted regular site visits to observe teaching and inspect physical resources. Student progress would be monitored through mid- and end-of-year internal boards, which processed student achievement.

The increased focus of UCC on the strategic prioritising of serving its local student population led to the decision half way through the previous strategic plan to relinquish partnership arrangements with OLC, which operated in Bolton, Manchester and London. This was a staggered phasing out of the provision, allowing all existing HNC students to complete an HND under the existing partnership, but ensuring that OLC's new HNC students would commence their studies under a new partnership with another provider. The end of both partnerships complied with the OfS' policy for reportable events, which were shared with the regulator in 2019 and 2022 respectively.

The partnership with VLUK ended in summer 2022, and at the request of VLUK all progressing HNC students were transferred to their new partner organisation. The changes of partnerships also re-shaped the overall student profiles of those studying at UCC, in particular those relating to ethnicity and age.

1.4.3 Changes to UCC's academic offer

As a consequence of changing validating university, and in recognition of changing student demand for programmes, UCC has placed a number of programmes on teach-out. They are:

- 2018: BA (Hons) Technical Theatre; BA (Hons) Acting and Creative Performance
- 2019: BA (Hons) Film Music and Soundtrack Production; BA (Hons) Graphic Design
- 2020: BA (Hons) Photography; BA (Hons) IT Systems and Applications

UCC has also withdrawn part-time study options for all Arts and Health programmes (2021) and full-time delivery of Construction (2022) to ensure a more cohesive student experience.

On the other hand, new programmes commenced at UCC in the following subjects:

- BEng, L6 top-up, 18 months part-time only (from Sept. 2019)
- BSc Sports Coaching, L6 top-up, 12 months full-time only (from Sept. 2020)

In repositioning our subject offer we have responded to a decline in demand for places on creative arts programmes, a temporary reduction in the number of students on industry-based courses during the covid-19 pandemic, but stability in demand for our Social Science courses, most notably BA (Hons) Early Years and BA (Hons) Counselling.

1.4.4 Changes to UCC's size of schools and geographical recruitment

Between 2018 and 2022 we have noted changes in demand for subjects, as well as an increasingly local student population. The result is an evolving student demographic, the experience of which has been captured quantitatively in the NSS surveys, but the underlying factors of which necessitated a degree of institutional awareness of shifting student needs and subject resourcing.
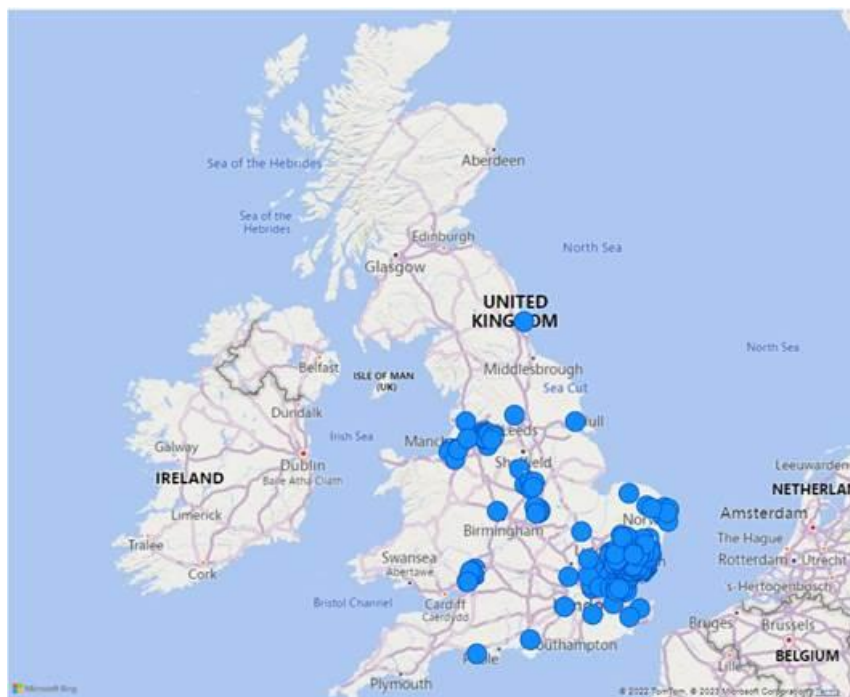
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Table 1 seeks to capture the impact of changes to sub-contracting by school. The number of HN students registered on partnerships fell from 379 to 0 (OLC) and almost halved from 97 to 50 (VLUK) between 2018 and 2021.

While the number of students for Social Sciences remained stable (288 to 280 for the same period), registered students in Applied Technologies fell from 164 to 70, as did the number of students in Visual and Performing Arts (from 286 to 171).

The years covered by the present TEF submission also witnessed a change in the geographical area UCC recruited from. In 2018/19 58% of students had Colchester, Chelmsford and Ipswich postcodes. By 2021/22 this percentage had increased to 81%, which suggests that the accessibility of Colchester Institute's campus through major road and public transport infrastructure seemed to have become a contributing factor in choosing to study here.[7]

Table 3. Visual representation of the areas UCC students apply from

As changing recruitment patterns regionally began to take effect, we developed a more detailed understanding of changes to student support as the result of wider changes. The DSA student support was removed from Colchester Institute's Student Support provision and placed in UCC's Academic Services portfolio, where a specialist post was created to support Higher Education students. (SEE: APP 2019-2020).

Consequently, we believe that UCC's student support has become more targeted and closely aligned with the needs in our student community. An application form (quoted below) from a current student underlines how UCC caters for mature applicants, some of whom are career changers:

 'I transitioned to engineering after finishing my humanities degree because I knew that I wanted to work a hands on role rather than office based.[…] Upon leaving the military I've worked several roles including as a medical equipment technician and a facilities engineer. […] Gaining the HNC in

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[7] In response to the HEPI report 114 'Homeward bound: Defining, understanding and aiding commuter students' (2018) we have defined a commuter student at UCC as someone who lives within travelling distance to Colchester from Chelmsford to Ipswich, and who does not stay in halls or residence or other student accommodation during term time.

electrical engineering will give me the knowledge and confidence to get further involved in systems development and modification, both in my current role and potential future ones.'[8]

1.4.5 Student Voice

We have decided to embed the student voice throughout the present document, and by drawing on student views that are already in the public domain as part of the NSS 2019-2022 comments, our aim has been to ensure that we represent the student voice through a succession of four graduating cohorts, which align the graduating years under consideration in the TEF 2023 data. A draft version of this report has been shared with the President of the Student Union, and volunteer participants drawn from our current post holders as student reps and super reps.

2. Student experience

We have constructed the basis of our narrative for this section around publically available data sets such as the National Student Survey (NSS), as well as student's qualitative and perspectives of their studies at UCC, as documented in the NSS. In addition we have used External Examiner reports to supplement the above information with regard to the student experience.

The breadth of academic disciplines studied at UCC has changed between 2018 and 2022, as a result of narrowing the curriculum offer and available pathways for study.

In line with paragraphs 131-133 of the Regulatory Guidance 22, UCC has used the following documentation to capture the published data of the NSS to provide an overall institutional context of the student experience.

This data is presented here as a four-year overview of the five key categories used for the purpose of the TEF.

Table 4. Headline TEF data for UCC

Category/Years	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Institutional NSS participation rate	73%	65%	76.15%	74.29%
No. of students taking part	130 (of 178)	108 (of 165)	99 (of 130)	104 (of 140)
Percentage value per individual respondent	0.76%	0.92%	1.01%	0.96%
Teaching on my course	90.38	84.72	75.76	75.72
Assessment and feedback	80.19	76.62	75.76	73.08
Academic Support	83.07	80.25	70.20	69.91
Learning Resources	72.95	69.44	52.02	56.63
Student voice	69.49	66.36	63.95	52.88

To evidence institutional engagement with the outcomes of each year's survey, UCC has drawn on its own annual internal 'UCC NSS report', which offers context to the surveys and makes key recommendations for improvement. The report is written jointly by the Dean of Higher Education and the Head of Academic Services, and presented at UCC's Learning & Teaching Committee (L&T) meeting in semester one. The proposed actions are debated and considered and agreed by the Heads of Schools and subsequently approved by Academic Board (AB). The reach of this paper is institution-wide; both L&T committee and AB have student representation, and AB papers are shared with the institution's executive team and with the College Governing Body's Curriculum and Quality Committee.[9]

The report is also shared with all staff at the annual staff development day in January, thus ensuring that staff, students and the organisation's executive have access to the full data set of the

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[8] See: UCC Student, staff and employer email correspondence TEF2023 report
[9] See: UCC Quality Assurance Policy, pp.9-11

NSS, as well as the UCC annual action plan.[10] The annual action plan is a rolling document, which is updated every year in light of actions completed, new actions arising and actions ongoing.

The introduction of UCC's first Flexible Teaching and Learning Plan, FTLP, (May 2020), initially drafted as a response to the Covid-10 pandemic, and subsequently revised every academic year, has established a hybrid programme delivery as a fundamental entitlement of the student experience at UCC.[11] It represents a practical step towards a more inclusive delivery format and evidences institutional learning from Covid-19, the latter resulting from changes in IT staff competencies and student expectations as the result of the pandemic in 2020.

A recent AMR review of UCC by Pearson highlighted the FTLP as 'a considered approach' and an example of good and innovative sector practice, noting its 'positive approach to planning 'blended learning.' [12]

The outcome of the FTLP on staff practice has been the promoting of a greater sense of pedagogical versatility, as one of the requirements of the FTLP advocates hybrid attendance and participation of lectures, both in-person and on-line.

We have built our evidence of quality experiences and outcomes for students around the quantitative and qualitative student feedback received in the NSS surveys. This ensures that the publically available, summative perspectives of the overall student experience positions our comments within an accountable context.

2.1.1 Student experience: the NSS in the context of UCC

Although the number of eligible students to take part in the NSS has reduced significantly between 2018 and 2022, the number of students actually taking part in the survey has remained relatively stable (108 in 2018 to 104 in 2022). The result is the subjects studied by the students surveyed may have changed, but that the ratio of participants has increased significantly (65% in 2018 to 74.29% in 2022). However, numerically the value of each student's response has remained relatively stable, representing 0.93% of participants in 2028 and 0.96% in 2022.

Much as a small number of participants can make survey results variable, if not unpredictable, some key themes about the institution's qualities in providing a positive student experience come through in the qualitative student feedback of the NSS.

UCC's internal review of the NSS 2022 suggested that

[Students]…'were complimentary about their experience at UCC, highlighted small class sizes, extensive lecturer support and attention to their own individual needs at strengths of the organisation. The following excerpts from students summarise their experience:

'The university has allowed me to reach grades I never expected to reach or thought I was capable of, I put this down to the small class sizes, engaging style of lectures and regular tutorials.'

'The university is a lovely small uni, it is very supportive and class sizes are small meaning everybody gets to know one another and the teachers.'

'As a foreign student, I felt immediately welcomed and part of the community. UCC inspired and motivated me… I will never forget this amazing experience.' [13]

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[10] See: UCC Action Pans 2018-2021
[11] See: UCC FTLP 2020-2021, 2021-2022
[12] See: Pearson Academic Management Review 2021-2022, p.19
[13] See: UCC NSS reports 2019-2022

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The educational benefit of small class sizes to one's own academic development was also highlighted in the NSS 2021 survey in which a student observed that:

'The small classes are good for enabling you to get more contact time with the lecturers and teachers'.

Another student was more specific about the link between smaller class sizes and the resulting academic support available:

'The smaller class sizes meant that I had so much support academically, and the stretch and challenge that I needed to achieve amazing results. Cannot recommend this course enough, it's been fantastic and I am so emotional that it's come to an end. I would do it all over again!'

To some, class size changes the experience of the participant to a more collaborative form of learning*:*

'I have enjoyed the seminar experiences on offer with every lecture. The class sizes have offered more of an individualised experience.'

The following section focuses on qualitative feedback from students, taken from NSS surveys between 2019 and 2022, and is grouped according the five overarching categories relevant to TEF 2023: Teaching, Assessment & Feedback, Academic Support, Learning Resources and Student voice.

Teaching

The overall level of student satisfaction with Teaching at UCC is at 81.7%% for full-time students (0.9% below benchmark of 82.6%) and 89.2% for part-time students (2.3% above benchmark of 86.9%). The number of survey participants was 400 for full-time students and 40 for part-time students.

There is no subject-level data for part-time students due to the small cohort sizes, but out of the six subject areas listed for full-time students, two are indicating above benchmark performance (Creative Arts at +4.4% and Education at +2.2%). Health sits at exactly the sector benchmark (84.9%), whereas Business & Management and Performing Arts are at -4% and -4.8% respectively. The lowest approval rating of Teaching was in Computing, a now discontinued provision, which only achieved -10.2% against the sector benchmark of 75.5%.

Student feedback within UCC indicates that critical views of teaching can be intertwined with the resourcing of teaching, which means that any criticism of the resourcing of a subject area is intrinsically linked to the overall educational experience of being taught (see Learning Resources).

Those that distinguish clearly between both, successfully highlight their pedagogical experience, as the following student feedback shows:

'The quality of teaching is amazing. Most of the tutors I have had have gone the extra mile to help me when I need/wanted it.'

One of UCC's strengths is the ability for staff to move a session content seamlessly between formal lectures, small group work, discussion forums and individual input into a student's development. This was highlighted in qualitative student feedback in the NSS 2019:

'The course was amazing and changed my perspectives in general, not only academically. The staff are so supportive and helpful, and the content is innovative and creative. The teaching has been so inspiring and the ongoing support for the future has been invaluable! I'm going to miss the atmosphere and the debates, and the teaching staff when I leave. I'm so hopeful for the future and

excited to go on to my next adventure, and so grateful to the people who have given me the confidence to achieve. Doing this course was the best decision that I made'.

Equipping students with the confidence to explore other subjects, future career paths and develop transferable knowledge and skills also underpins an initiative introduced in autumn 2019 and summarised as follows in UCC's NSS 2019 report:

'To encourage students to engage with more than their course, UCC has introduced an enrichment activity from October 2019 onwards (evidenced in all course handbooks), which invites students to enrol on a module other than what is part of their course, subject to certain conditions. It is an attempt to enable students to develop additional skills, learn more about other subjects (which may influence decisions with regard to postgraduate study), and generally begin to meet students from other programme communities.' [14]

Due to the pandemic, we have yet to see this take up recover but it is hoped that as we go forward students will feel more enabled to take part in this initiative.

Students also acknowledged the connection between individual attention from staff within a small class community and the resulting support available for those with individual learning needs. The following three statement are taken from the NSS 2022 survey and address just this point:

'I was lucky to have good lecturer who have helped me and aided in me being diagnosed with   .'

'Tutors throughout have always seemed to care about the student's education and mental health'.

'Good teaching, very supportive for students with   and other learning disabilities and mental conditions.'

Assessment and feedback

Assessment and feedback at feedback at UCC are linked holistically to the students' experience of a module. A student's entitlement of two individual 20-minute academic tutorials per module with the module tutor creates the opportunity for personalised feedback on course work, as well as extra support. This is in addition to a standardised, institution wide approach to assessment which has separate boxes for feedback and feed-forward, and is recognised in NSS 2022 student feedback:

'Feedback is always very useful and constructive and the lecturers are very supportive.'

'The staff have all been very easy to contact and gain helpful feedback easily.'

The overall level of student satisfaction with assessment and feedback at UCC is at 76.1% for full-time students (1.4% above the sector benchmark of 74.7%) and 81.8% for part-time students (1.2% below benchmark of 83.0%).

There is no subject-level data for part-time students due to the small cohort sizes, but out of the six subject areas listed for full-time students, six are indicating above benchmark performance, ranging from +0.2% in Computing to +5.4% in Health and +7.4% in Education. Below benchmark indicators are in Performing Arts (-5.4%) and Business & management (-4.9%). Student satisfaction assessment and feedback in Creative Arts sits above both UCC and sector averages by 2%. Qualitative feedback from students in the NSS survey 2022 made the connection between class sizes and receiving personalised, and formative feedback:

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[14] See: UCC NSS qualitative student feedback 2019-2022

'Direct staff support on a 1:1 basis.'

'The cohort is small which means the tutors are able to give very specific feedback, give more time to students and tailor content to meet all students' needs and interests. The staff made transitions online due to COVID as seamless as possible'

External examiners, too, noted the attention UCC gives to feedback practices, and standardisations thereof across our programmes. External Examiners for programmes in all three Schools noted that:

'The consistent use of assessment rubrics and highly detailed, relevant and supportive written feedback (and feed-forward) is delivering high-quality education to your students.' (External Examiner report, Popular Music, 2022)[15]

'Feedback and feed forward for assignments were excellent to indicate to students that information received not only pertains to the assessed work but also contained information that must inform subsequent work' (External Examiner report, BEng Engineering, 2022)[16]

'I remain struck by the emphasis on constructive feedback including the feedback-forward which features on a separate part of the marking sheet. The parity in length and style of feedback across the modules and in the 2 years I reviewed this programme is commendable.' (External Examiner report, Health and Psychosocial Studies, 2022)[17]

Academic Support

NSS student feedback for academic support rates the provision at 75.2% for full-time study (3.4% below sector benchmark) and at 85.9% for part-time students (0.9% above sector benchmark).

Below the headline data there are some discrepancies depending on the subject area studied. The only subject-level data set available for part-time study, Education, is 2.1% above the sector benchmark (83.6%), and full-time study also indicates an above benchmark performance for Education (+2.1%) and Health (+0.4%). At the other end of the student rating for full-time study are Computing (8.1% below benchmark) and Business & Management (11% below benchmark), a rating we believe reflects the former use of outdated IT equipment, which in these subject areas is closely linked to students' academic experience.

Student feedback has shown that the pedagogical understanding by staff strongly compliments any subject-specific expertise and increases the effectiveness of teaching. Staff agree as well:

'The role that professional development plays in Higher Education is an invaluable resource. I am mindful of the investment made by UCC in enabling development through attending a part-time level 7 course that encouraged links between the UKPSF and one's own teaching. The effect is multi-layered, being both an innate lesson in objectivity as well as a framework for ensuring that professional standards are maintained and upheld.' (Health and Social Care)[18]

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[15] See: UCC External Examiner reports 2022
[16] Ditto
[17] Ditto
[18] See: UCC Student, staff and employer email correspondence TEF2023 report

UCC's staff training activities, delivered by colleagues in the School of Social Sciences, encourages all teaching staff to work towards a recognised teaching qualification or recognition by linking Teaching & Learning at UCC to Advance HE's Professional Standards Framework.[19]

In September 2022, 37 out of 45 core UCC lecturing staff (just over 75%) had completed either HEA fellowships or held PG Cert or PGCE qualifications, which underlines the institution's commitment to furthering the pedagogical expertise of its lecturing team.

Working towards Advance HE fellowship recognition and/or a PGCE qualification is built into the research policy at UCC, and further supported through the annual appraisal process administered by the Heads of School.[20] UCC funds all HEA and PG Cert and PGCE qualifications fully, and provides staff with a reduced workload for the duration of their studies.

UCC has a number of programmes with PSRB accreditation. The following excerpt from the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) highlighted the connection between staff competency and the support available to students:

Thank you for the excellent preparation and materials sent prior to the visit. This is clear evidence of the high professional standards this course is providing. This continued during the visit and assessors were delighted to hear numerous positive comments from students regarding the standard of teaching delivery, course content and staff competency. It is clear that staff model the ethos of this course. Staff were seen by students as approachable, non-judgmental and inclusive. […] The teaching session we observed was creative, well-balanced and thought out, with a clear aim of not only imparting theory but engaging students to learn through participation.[21]

We have linked the positive student feedback to Academic Support in the School of Social Sciences (incl. Education) to a School-wide embedding of academic skill acquisition into the programmes' modular course content. The programme validations that followed the institutional revalidation event in autumn 2018 advocated a consistent approach to academic support and skill development into the programme design, linking module content across L4 and L5 to the dissertation module at L6.

In addition, every student is entitled to two individual 20 minute academic tutorials per module and one 30 minutes pastoral tutorial per semester for the duration of their studies.[22] Tutorials are provided only by the lecturing staff associated with programme delivery.

This formula has also been made available to teach-out programmes validated by the University of Essex, to ensure parity of the student experience at UCC from September 2019 onwards. The result has been the creation of an integrated academic student support structure that has resulted in the following student feedback:

'One-on-one tutor sessions allowed for students to receive critical feedback tailored for them and their work.'

'The staff for my course have been amazing throughout with all the assistance I needed when needed.'[23]

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[19] See: University Centre Colchester (2021). Teaching & Learning Strategy 2021-2025.
[20] See: University Centre Colchester (2021). Research, Knowledge Transfer & Scholarly Activity Strategy 2021-2022
[21] See: UCC Student, staff and employer email correspondence TEF2023 report. Email correspondence between the BACP and the course leader regarding the re-accreditation report 2022
[22] See: For example, see programme specification for Early Years for evidence of tutorial support embedded at module level: https://www.colchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Module-Outline-L4-Academic-Practice.pdf
[23] See: UCC NSS qualitative student feedback 2019-2022

In addition to the one-to-one support available to students, and to supplement the focus on academic skill development across the years of study even more, UCC has created a new lectureship in Learning Technologies as part of its Theory of Change, first articulated in the Access and Participation plan 2019-2020:

'*The aim of the post is to design, write and produce UCC resources that support students' academic practice and that facilitate independent learning of academically relevant skills.*[24]

Two student participants who were part of the student group that trialled the new courses reported that:

'*I finished the 2 courses and wanted to thank you for such useful information and tips. I particularly liked the formal note taking techniques as well as the tips how to avoid distractions. I particularly found how to find academic journal articles/reports and managing time useful. It's so easy to find articles and the videos are very easy to follow. I can now use the e-books and articles in my essay. […] I am sure it will benefit lots of other students.*' (Student 1)

'*I believe these E-learning tools will become a boon in regard to studying skills required in order to progress as smoothly as possible throughout our courses. It was very informative and beautifully presented. This is something I believe many students will use and need in order to make our academic lives easier during the semesters.*' (Student 2)

This new post has been the result of an institutional recognition of student needs.

Learning resources

In general, student responses to learning resources (physical and digital) can sometimes focus on one at the expense of the other. For example, student feedback has been highly critical of IT resources, less so of physical spaces, appreciative of library facilities and very complimentary about the online learning resourcing on Moodle at a modular level, which is interwoven with the resourcing of learning.

UCC has very good specialist learning spaces (e.g. dance studios), excellent vocational equipment for the learning of traditional arts techniques (e.g. printing, sewing) but also a problem with outdated IT equipment and infrastructure, which has now been resolved.

The overall level of student satisfaction with Learning Resources at UCC is at 63% for full-time students (16.5% below benchmark of 79.6%) and 70.7% for part-time students (6.2% below benchmark of 76.9%). Below the headline data there are some significant subject variations, which have led UCC to address these issues from 2020 onwards. The smallest gap between UCC data for full-time students and the sector benchmark is in Health (UCC: 73.6%, benchmark 80.1%), whereas the gap is at its widest in Computing (UCC: 39.4%, benchmark 74%). Other large gaps appear in Education (20.5% below benchmark), Creative and Performing Arts (16.3% and 13.5% below benchmark respectively) and Business & Management (14% below benchmark). As outlined above, we believe that in areas such as Computing and Business & Management students' rating of digital learning resources is closely linked to the tools used in the subject areas themselves, and therefore more vulnerable to critical ratings.

We acknowledge a decline in student approval ratings over a four-year period, which became more pronounced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic:

Table 5. NSS student rating of Learning Resources, 2018-2022

Category/Years	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Learning Resources	72.95	69.44	52.02	56.63

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[24] See: UCC Student, staff and employer email correspondence TEF2023 report

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As a result of the significant drop in student satisfaction with Learning Resources in 2020, UCC has considered the underlying causes of the overall decline in student satisfaction. These causes are centred on IT and physical spaces, and are evident in successive NSS student comments, as well as verbal student feedback given to the Student Experience Officer.[25]

In addition, Colchester Institute was the target of a significant cyber attack in spring 2021, which impacted on course delivery for a six-week period, and on the overall student experience at a critical point of the academic year.

Although the overall impact of the Covid-19 pandemic is present in sector-wide performance statistics, it is clear that UCC was particularly exposed due to relying on aging IT infrastructures and equipment, which impacted on the student experience of having to move all teaching online in March 2020. We expect to see student ratings of learning resources impacted on not only by the ripple effects of the pandemic and the cyber attack, but also because of a justifiable change in student expectations.

The single biggest decline in satisfaction happened in line with the Covid-19 pandemic, and just after Colchester Institute had made the first of a number of substantial investments to update its IT infrastructure on campus. These issues have now been largely resolved, as the financial accounts for Colchester Institute demonstrate a significant investment in IT of over £1 million in 2020-21 and 2021-22.[26]

This investment addressed infrastructure, hardware and software. The key elements were replacing the outdated CISCO through new servers, endpoints and improved Internet security, as well as upgrading all student-facing desktops, and wall mountable screens.

In 2020 UCC's internal NSS report observed that:

'It had been hoped that the ongoing investment into the Colchester Institute IT infrastructure, which commenced in 2018, would have started to deliver visible improvements to the IT satisfaction rates in 2019/20. This has not been the case, and a further drop of 10 percentage points placing UCC 28.62% below the national average in this category shows a deep rooted, and possibly embedded view across students.

Extensive investment has since been made during 2020 to allow for the digital delivery of the curriculum both on campus and remotely. […] Additionally, the proactive investment in hardware to allow UCC's Flexible Teaching and Learning Plan (FTLP) should make the IT infrastructure more robust for the delivery of the curriculum in 2020/21.'[27]

By spring 2022 both the required IT infrastructure and the IT equipment available to students on campus been replaced to the same standard, and we therefore expect see to see a positive impact in the NSS 2023 in this category.

Early signs of this upgrade to the student experience are already visible in external examiner reports in summer 2022, which noted the following of an improved remote access to course resources, assessment submissions and marked course work:

'It's great to see the Music Department taking advantage of the tools offered by the VLE (Google Classrooms) to enhance teaching delivery and opportunities for learning.... I had access to ATS2 and all teaching materials available on Google Classroom in time for me to view them before the Board.' (External Examiner report for Popular Music: Performance and Production, 2022)

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[25] See: UCC Student, staff and employer email correspondence TEF2023 report
[26] See: UCC Student, staff and employer email correspondence TEF2023 report
[27] See: UCC Action PLANS 2018-2021

Students also recognised the work that was done at UCC:

'Use of technology has grown since the start of the course and adaptations needed to teach lectures online have led to effective lessons. Relevant external examiner feedback on excellent assessment and feedback practices' (UCC NSS qualitative student feedback 2022)

In addition to improving the digital experience of resources, UCC has also taken steps to address student dissatisfaction with the provision of physical spaces in Creative and Performing Arts (Creative and Performing Arts (16.3% and 13.5% below benchmark respectively). Student rep feedback highlighted two points in particular: the use of shared specialist resources with FE students, which is seen by HE students as compromising their Higher Education experience, and the lack of investment in new equipment (both IT and Arts-specific).

With the exception of Musical Theatre spaces, all other Arts programmes operate from September 2022 onwards in bespoke HE buildings or floors, and autumn 2022 has seen a significant investment in Arts studios in the School of Art.

Looking beyond the NSS student feedback, we are keen to apply what we have learnt from student feedback in the Arts to other aspects of our provision, to ensure a more widely available and equitable student experience. From 2022-23 Construction and Engineering will fully relocate to the HE building once the capital grant allocation by the OfS for three Engineering labs has been installed.[28]

However, some existing learning resources are consistently valued highly by the students. The library offered extended access to online subscriptions of journals during the Covid-19 pandemic, and continued to be accessible to students:

'The library is full of great resources and the librarians are helpful with finding them and with referencing.'[29]

As a result of the actions taken with regard to IT we expect student satisfaction with learning resources to continue to rise from its position in 2021-22. But we are alert to the fact that student engagement with, and expectations of, digital resourcing of learning will continue to increase.

Student voice

We have recognised the need for UCC to address the following headline downward trend in the student voice rating of the NSS.

Table 6. NSS student rating of Student Voice, 2018-2022

Category/Years	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Student voice	69.49	66.36	63.95	52.88

Conversations with students in student rep meeting have identified that need for the feedback loop to be closed. Students believe that they have a voice at UCC, and that student representation at all levels of UCC's boards, committees and validation panels is valued by staff. However, students also believe that the actions taken as a result of their contribution to meetings need to be disseminated more effectively.

Our internal summary report for the 2019 NSS student survey identifies the following action as a response to the student voice:

'The NSS student feedback suggests that UCC needs to get a better at demonstrating to students what the outcome of their feedback has been. We have therefore created the post of student

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[28] See: UCC Action plan 2022-23 in UCC Action Plans 2018-2021
[29] See: entry for 2022 in UCC NSS qualitative student feedback 2019-2022

experience officer within UCC Academic Services, with specific responsibility for meeting with student representatives mid-Semester for feedback, and for disseminating information from UCC Academic Services about actions taken as a result of student engagement.'[30]

Consideration of intersectional data of the OfS dashboard has shown that there appears to be a considerable gap between the degree to which 1st degree undergraduates (6.8% below benchmark: sample size: 370) and all other undergraduate students (22.2% below benchmark; sample size: 20) believe their voice is being heard. Considering this outcome at subject level also highlights further variants in the student response. In Computing and Health the result is 3.2% and 3.9% respectively below benchmark whereas Business and Management indicates a -19.5% below benchmark rating.

This data is regrettable, but ultimately confirms why there has been a strategic change at UCC in relation to engaging with the student voice ratings on a more principled level.

We have introduced a student communication platform (UCC Academic Services Student newsletter) to be able to address the issue of closing the feedback loop. Furthermore, in 2021 we initiated changes to the order of standing items in Learning & Teaching committee meetings, which has moved the student representative item to the beginning of the meeting, so that staff feedback on issues raised by students has a more prominent place in the agenda.

The responsibility for closing the feedback loop has been taken on by the UCC Student Experience Officer. Aside from formal student feedback mechanisms, students appear to value the personal contact and the personalised professional support offered by teaching staff. Observation such as those below are characteristic of the UCC student experience, and the degree to which the individual student voice is heard as part of the overall academic experience:

'staff know you on a name to name basis and are able to offer help in-person' and

'the course is like a family, we are a tight community and we work alongside each other frequently, which I really like. My tutor is constantly pushing us and wanting us to do well in the future.'[31]

3. Student Outcomes

We have constructed the basis of our narrative for this section around publically available data sets such as completion and progression data, as well as student's qualitative perspectives of their studies at UCC. In addition we have used employer feedback to illustrate the relevance of students' educational attainment to their own professional journey.

3.1 Student achievement

3.1.1 Classification of awards
Student achievement for degree awards between 2018 and 2022 has resulted in the following outcomes:

Table 7. Classification of degree awards at UCC, 2018-22

Year/classification	2018/9	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
First class	30%	34%	38%	31%
Upper second class	48%	39%	38%	34%
Lower Second Class	18%	23%	18%	25%
Third class	5%	4%	6%	10%

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[30] See: entry for 2019 in UCC NSS reports 2019-2022
[31] See: UCC NSS qualitative student feedback 2019-2022

We note that the ratio of good degrees to other awards is around 3 to 1, with the exception of 2021/22. The reason for lower classifications that year was due to the proportionately larger percentage of final year students who completed a top-up award in a subject area, which has attracted students from a predominantly practice-based background. A second cohort on a more technical degree completed a bridging module before embarking on the final year. Whilst the second cohort is too small numerically to allow for direct comparisons, we believe that this model of student support will improve the transition to level 6 for the practice-based area and will be included in this programme.

Student achievement for HNC awards between 2019 and 2022 has led to the following outcomes:

Table 8.Classification of HNC awards at UCC, 2019-22

Year/classification	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Distinction	10%	40%	5%
Merit	21%	25%	26%
Pass	69%	35%	69%

Student achievement for HND awards between 2019 and 2022 produced the following outcomes:

Table 9.Classification of HNC awards at UCC, 2019-22

Year/classification	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Distinction	1%	12%	26%
Merit	10%	16%	22%
Pass	89%	72%	52%

Student achievement is positive at UCC, and we are proud of our Widening Participation work, but UCC has been determined not to measure institutional progress, or any other aspect of the provision, through the classification of awards alone. We are mindful of the very small number of graduating students we have every year, and that variable classification of awards outcome statistics are a more likely feature of our provision than that of larger institutions. We have therefore placed emphasis on measuring institutional improvements through aligning marking standards across our Schools (as illustrated in the assessment part of section 2), on carefully re-designing learning outcomes for modules (as achieved in our course validations between November 2019 and February 2021) and on sharing external examiner feedback in relation to standards and assessments across our organisation (which has been included in parts of the present submission).

The result is summarised in two students' summative observation of their qualification in the NSS 2022 survey:

'I gained a qualification and experience which I value now.'

'I highly recommend this course to others and other study areas at the university.' [32]

3.1.2 Educational gains
We welcome the inclusion of educational gains in the TEF 2023 process as a recognised mechanism for understanding a student's educational journey, and thus as a form of measuring the benefits of Higher Education to an individual. The Regulatory Advice 22 sets out that 'there is currently no national measure of educational gain' and therefore invites providers to 'demonstrate a clear articulation of their ambitions for educational gain, [and] credible approaches for delivering this, *and where* possible evidence that it is delivered in practice.' [33]

Central to the complexity of capturing quantitatively what ultimately appears to be an individual, and qualitative, improvement to academic and 'softer' skills in personal development is the

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[32] See: UCC NSS qualitative student feedback 2019-2022
[33] See: Office for Students (2022). Regulatory Guidance 22, p.11

quantifying of the latter with an agreed degree of variance, and measurable reporting points in between.

An OfS learning gain project offered the following definition of learning gains: *'Learning gain can be defined as the change in knowledge, skills, work-readiness and personal development, as well as enhancement of specific practices and outcomes in defined disciplinary and institutional contexts'.*[34]

We recognise that measuring educational gains needs not only be able to track academic development, personal development and work readiness. Any frame work designed should be able to respond to individual's academic journey, and therefore embrace experiences on degree courses as much as HN and top-up routes, as well as experiential learning which may go beyond the timescale and scope of sequential modular learning, including higher apprenticeships and, in the very near future, micro-credentials.

The RAND report of 2015 offers the opportunity to frame a discussion about learning gains as a process that looks at 'distance travelled':

'Learning gain is understood in a variety of ways by the higher education sector: as the difference in student performance between two stages of their studies, as a variant of the concept of 'value added' commonly used in school performance tables, or simply as 'learning'. […]
For the purposes of this report, the concept of 'learning gain' is defined as the 'distance travelled', or the difference between the skills, competencies, content knowledge and personal development demonstrated by students at two points in time. This allows for a comparison of academic abilities and how participation in higher education has contributed to such intellectual development.[35]

For the purpose of the current TEF submission, we propose the following approach as an initial institutional benchmarking for quantifying educational gains. It is, in the first instance and for the purpose of our pilot study only, based on the following observations:

- Learning outcomes designed to meet Level 4 and Level 6 descriptors represent in themselves a growing degree of sophistication in the application of academic practice;
- Therefore an identical mark at L4 and L6 for the same type of submission denotes positive academic development;
- A higher mark at L6 than at L4 for the same type of submission can be argued to represent enhanced educational gain.

Given the number of substantial changes that have occurred at UCC between 2018 and 2022, we have decided to focus our investigation of learning gains on two programmes, Early Years and Counselling, that have remained largely unchanged, within the overall context of re-validations and a change of validating university. One programme comes with PSRB accreditation (Counselling), the other does not. Both courses are the two largest programme cohorts at UCC, and the students' experience of learning gains therefore covers around one quarter of the entire current annual intake at UCC, which allows the investigation of learning gains to consider a sizeable, and consistent, percentage of the UCC student population.

For the purpose of the following tables we have taken two student cohorts, tracked their achievement in modules that promote academic practice over three years and identified their overall gain numerically, both by level of study and as summative achievement in the column marked 'difference'.

We have deliberately not included pre-UCC learning in this calculation as the purpose of the present measuring on learning gain is focused entirely on assessments carried out within UCC. The intention therefore has been to measure learning gain by ensuring that the measuring points are based on UCC assessments, rather than those of external providers at pre Level 4. Due to the

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[34] Office for Students (2019). Final evaluation of the office for Students Learning Gain Projects, p.19
[35] RAND (2015). Learning gain in higher education, p. xi

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small sample sizes concerned we have chosen not to present any intersectional data, as this may compromise the anonymous presentation of students' achievements.

Table 10. BA (Hons) Early Years (2018/19 cohort)

Early Years 18/19 Cohort							
Name	Year 1 Average	Year 3 Average	Difference	L4 AP	L5 AP	L6 Dissertation	
Average	59.91	70.20	10.29	63.00	66.63	67.75	4.75

Table 11. BA (Hons) Early Years (2019/10 cohort)

Early Years 19/20 Cohort							
Name	Year 1 Average	Year 3 Average	Difference	L4 AP	L5 AP	L6 Dissertation	
Average	64.59	68.90	4.31	64.73	63.47	69.20	4.47

Table 12. BA (Hons) Counselling (2018/19 cohort)

Counselling 18/19 Cohort							
Name	Year 1 Average	Year 3 Average	Difference	L4 AP	L5 AP	L6 Dissertation	
Average	64.37	64.20	-0.17	64.28	62.11	64.33	0.06

Table 13. BA (Hons) Counselling (2019/20)

Counselling 19/20 Cohort							
Name	Year 1 Average	Year 3 Average	Difference	L4 AP	L5 AP	L6 Dissertation	Difference
Average	62.84	67.92	5.08	58.46	58.62	67.54	9.08

The 'distance travelled' is evident in the overall numbers provided, yet detailed enough to capture some emerging perspectives. Firstly, the majority of students in all four cohorts have experienced a positive outcome. Secondly, the measuring points across all three years demonstrate that students develop academic skills and growing sophistication in constructing academic arguments at different points of their studies.

The above data sets offer both a degree of certainty and ambiguity in the debate around learning gains. The certainty is based on a specific focus on two courses (and subjects), as well as the measuring of learning gains through marks awarded for the quality of academic development, which itself s measured in academic writing, research and referencing skills and critical thinking. The limitations of the above information, and thus ambiguity of the information provided, is due to a narrow perspective of learning gains as arising from academic development alone, rather than a broader focus on personal development and work readiness. However, for the latter to be quantifiable across programmes it would need to be built into assessed learning outcomes, and thus shape future module content and assessment design.

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3.2 Student outcomes

Continuation indicators
For information about now discontinued sub-contractors, which impacted on student outcomes, please see section 1.4.2. Both changes in sub-contracting are reflected in the significant decrease of Pearson registered students at UCC, which have reduced by over 80% over the four years covered by TEF 2023.

The implication for understanding and interpreting of the TEF data is that during 2018 and 2022 the ratio between students studying on the UCC campus and those studying with sub-contractors. This is reflected in the student feedback and continuation indicators

Table 14. Ratio of students taught by sub-contractors

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
UCC in Colchester	61%	72%	86%	91%	100%
UCC partnerships (OLC and VLUK)	39%	28%	14%	9%	0%

Continuation amongst full-time students at UCC is overall 5.7% below benchmark at 73.9%. This figure separates out into 1st degree students at 1.6% below benchmark and all other undergraduates at 9.0% below benchmark. Cross-referencing this performance at subject level, it appears that the partnership performance in Business & Management (sample size: 680 students) at 8.3% below benchmark is a major part of the overall outcome.

Similarly to part-time completion indicators (see below), the part-time continuation rate is also noticeably below sector benchmark (81.1%) at 72.1%. of concern has been the continuation rate amongst part-time Arts students (sample size:), who recorded a 24.4% gap when compared to the benchmark of 65%.

We found that the introduction of a more rigorous admissions process (see section 1) improved the continuation rates amongst part-time students, but it also reduced the number of students on this pathway, which in turn we believe impacted on the student experience. To ensure that that year groups have an integrated experience of their studies, we have closed access to part-time Arts programmes in 2021 (see completion indicators).

We monitor the reasons for non-continuation annually through an exit interview with the course leader concerned and exit questionnaire, administered by UCC Academic Services. The following table categorises the reasons for non-continuation at UCC:

Table. 15. Reasons cited by students for non-continuation, 2018-2022

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
Financial				
Ill Health				
Career Change				
HEI Transfer				
Personal	30%	24%	30%	22%
Other (not specified)			0%	0%
Academic Failure	54%	48%	48%	60%

The relevance of this information is discussed in management meetings, with a focus on identifying and addressing underlying factors that are within UCC's remit. Given our policy of interviewing all applicants, and our strong provision of academic and pastoral support when on programme, we conclude that the single biggest factor for non-continuation are changes in personal circumstance, which apply to between 22% and 30% of non-continuation.

To support students in the continuation of their studies, we have introduced a free to use 24-7 telephone or online support service in which students have access to qualified counsellors. Calls

are anonymous, but user data is shared with UCC to enable us to understand where then the stress points are during the academic year.

Completion indicators

Completion data at UCC stands at 72.8% for full-time undergraduates against a sector benchmark of 79.2% (-6.45). An intersectional consideration shows that for 1st degree students this equates to -4.25, but that the all other undergraduates category is some -10.1% below sector benchmark.

Part-time students (sample size: 390) achieve overall -3.4% against the national benchmark of 82.0%, but there are considerable differences between subject-level achievements.

Computing (sample size: 60) performs strongly at 3.4% above benchmark, as does Building/Architecture (sample size: 50) at +8.1%. On the other hand, the Arts (sample size:) at UCC trail the national benchmark of 61.35 by 23.3%.

We believe that the two major factors that impact on this performance indicator are the completion rates at former partnership institutions, and UCC's part-time Arts provision. As part of our ongoing reflection on and restructuring of our academic offer as set out in section 1, the subcontracted partnerships have now been discontinued (see section 1.4.1), and all part-time access to all Arts courses was closed in September 2021.

Progression indicators

Student progression data overall is in line with sector benchmark performance (+0.8%). There are some variations by mode of study. 1st degree students are above benchmark (=1.4%), but sit fractionally below the 'UCC only' performance of +1.6%. In contrast students taught at former partnership organisations only achieved a rating of 0.3% below their sector average.

Part-time students (sample size:) overall achieved -3.4% against the benchmark, and the only subject-level data available in this category, Education (sample size:), exceeded the benchmark by +3.2%.

UCC has strong regional employer links, regular employer panels and has invested in an online virtual careers platform, UCC Careers Plus. The package includes interactive training packages for IT skills, CV writing, interview techniques and other employability skills. It includes up to date employer information at sector and national levels, as well as access to current job opportunities with local regional and multi-national employers. Students can start to utilise the service at the point of registration and have continued access throughout their programme of study as well as post-graduation as Alumni of University Centre Colchester.

The positive impact of studying at UCC can be evidenced on a number of different levels, from the programme design itself, to external scrutiny by QAA, PSRBs, to employer feedback and wider sector recognition.

Our most recent QAA review was in November 2019, which resulted in the following outcome:

Table 16. QSRMI outcomes, 2019

Ref.	Core Practice	Outcome	Confidence
Q1	The provider has a reliable, fair and inclusive admissions system.	Met	High
Q5	The provider actively engages students, individually and collectively, in the quality of their educational experience.	Met	Moderate
Q6	The provider has fair and transparent procedures for handling complaints and appeals which are accessible to all students.	Met	Moderate

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Q9	The provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes.	Met	High

With regard to engaging students in their educational experience, the QSRMI report noted that

'there is a clear and effective policy for student engagement and evidence of a robust and credible approach to actively engage with students, both individually and collectively, at programme level. Here, the review team found numerous examples of the Institute changing and improving students' learning experience as a result of student engagement. Students report that the Institute engages them in the quality of their educational experience…' [36]

In terms of outcomes, the panel stated that the College

'*supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes. This is because assessment feedback to students is of high quality, comprehensive, helpful and students report that it is timely'* [37]

Professional body accreditation of UCC's BA (Hons) Counselling provision highlighted that the provision of our own Colchester Institute Counselling Service, which is attached to UCC's School of Social Sciences, represents a training facility for students that exceeds any professional body requirements. Open to the public at a minimal charge, student trainee counsellors are able to work with clients while still under supervision from the UCC course team. This training programme not only fulfils part of UCC's civic mission (to serve the community it is based in), it also enables students to experience the work place while still in training.[38] UCC programmes also have CIOB and CMDA accreditations.

The relevance of training to the regional employment market goes across our programme provision, and thus student experience, across all our Schools. Colchester institute's reputation for vocational training up to Level 3, and its long-standing connections to regional industry, are highly beneficial to UCC students, some of whom have progressed to L4 study through internal institutional progression. Employers, therefore, often report back on student outcomes with the benefit of having seen the students progress both in the workplace and at UCC.

For example, a student who graduated in   has been nominated as one of four finalists in the National Construction Awards of Excellence 'Young Employee of the Year' award run by the National Federation of Builders, and will be heading to the final in Tower Bridge next year (   ). The employer added that his nomination '*is a real credit to   progress & training'.*

Student feedback from across the years also indicates that students across all Schools are aware of, and rate, the relevance of their training in relation to employability and career progression:[39]
'Fantastic teaching staff with great industry contacts to get work experience from. […] The networking events are really good.'

Some students link changes in career and/or salary increases directly to their experience at UCC: promotion at work due to their studies at UCC:

'I obtained a pay rise in year two in line with my training agreement which was based on my performance at university which my mentor […] was very good at relaying […]'

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[36] See: Quality Assurance Agency. QRSMI report Colchester Institute, 2019, p.2
[37] See: Ditto, p.3
[38] See: UCC Strategic Plan 2021-2024
[39] See: UCC NSS qualitative student feedback 2019-2022

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'When I started UCC I was a trainee office manager for a   company […] With my progression and high grades at university after my second year I was promoted to Business Development & Marketing'.

We note that what constitutes a career-enhancing Higher Education experience varies considerably between professions, and a provider's acknowledgement of such experiences must therefore reflect to prism of today's workplace. In terms of UCC's impact this would suggest that evidence a strong and positive student experience should be found across all three Schools in UCC. For example, the graduating cohort of 2021 of students who completed the BA (Hons) Health and Social Care in 2020 either all went on to pursue Master's degrees, PGCEs or are now in professional employment. A   employer recently wrote the following evaluation of an employee's training on the same programme:

'The degree course that our employee has completed has enabled her to significantly grow in confidence and ability and to increase the scope of the roles she has been able to undertake effectively within our organisation. It has been a pleasure to see her expand her skills, theoretical knowledge base and apply these to her every day activities within the workplace.'[40]

On the other hand, a student who graduated in   was given a promotion (and pay rise) by his employer, as result of completing their qualification at UCC.

'Since studying a mechanical/manufacturing engineering course, I have progressed from a   to a   […] A pay increase was earned when changing from a   to a   .'[41]

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[40] See: UCC Student, staff and employer email correspondence TEF2023 report
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