

TEF 2023

1. Provider context

Pearson College Limited (PCL) was established in 2012 as an autonomous, not-for-profit legal entity within the Pearson PLC group, a global FTSE 100 company.

We have two schools:

- **Escape Studios (ES)** has undergraduate (UG) degrees (including integrated Master's programmes) in Visual Effects (VFX), Game Art and Animation. ES also runs professional short courses and Master's degrees.
- **Pearson Business School (PBS)** offers UG programmes in Business and Management, Accounting and Law, including two integrated Master's programmes.

Since 2015, we have had a validation agreement with the University of Kent (UoK) for all our programmes.

Educational mission and strategic aims

Our mission:

*"...to become one of the UK's leading universities for in-depth industry engagement which helps our students develop the knowledge, intellectual capacity and professional experience they need for their long-term careers. Our courses are designed to be academically demanding, industry informed, and to inspire students with a real interest in how their chosen discipline plays a role in the modern professional world."*¹

Collaboration with employers is at the heart of our identity and is embedded in all our programmes and student experience. Our ambition has been to use our unique position within a global corporation to create specialist knowledge on industry collaboration across disciplines and to forge innovative links between the world of work, and learning and teaching in higher education (HE). This knowledge then provides students with an engaging learning experience which is challenging, authentic and relevant to industry. Our students leave PCL ready for the world of work, as demonstrated by our outstanding progression outcomes.

Our connections to industry and the industry relevance of our provision are often recognised in our qualitative NSS data, specifically referenced in 123 comments from 432 responses over the last four years². Students comment on the *"invaluable"*, *"insightful"* and *"fantastic"* links to industry and the *"meaningful feedback"* that they receive. They value the *"opportunities"* and *"transferable skills"* that they gain enabling them to *"kick-start"* their careers.

External recognition of our commitment to industry engagement has included:

- 2019 **Independent HE Outstanding Industry Partnership Award** in recognition of our industry partnerships and initiatives, and providing life-long learning opportunities for students;
- 2021 finalist for **Best University and Employer Engagement Strategy Award**, Institute of Student Employers;
- 2021 shortlisted for **Best University Employability Strategy Award** in Target Jobs, National Graduate Recruitment Awards;
- 2002 shortlisted for **Outstanding Collaboration (commercial, community or employability)**, Independent HE awards.

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Our commitment to industry engagement is also evidenced by the impressive list of industry partners with whom we work regularly. These range from start-ups, SMEs and small studios, to global companies and multi-award-winning studios. Some examples include:

- Multi-award-winning visual effects and animation studios such as DNEG (Dune, Interstellar, Inception), Framestore (Harry Potter series, Gravity, Bladerunner 2049) and Industrial Light & Magic (ILM) (Jurassic Park, Black Panther, Star Wars franchise);
- Multi-award-winning game developers such as Creative Assembly (Total War series) and Playstation London Studio (Singstar);
- Global brands such as Moët Hennessey and Salesforce, as well as using our connections with Pearson Plc.

ES has been repeatedly ranked by The Rookies³, which is driven and judged by industry professionals, based on the quality of student team projects, as follows:

- Named one of the **Top 50 Creative Media & Entertainment Schools and Colleges in the World** in 2021 (2nd in UK, 29th overall) and 2022 (2nd in UK, 28th overall);
- Named one of the **Best Game Design and Development Schools** in the world in 2021 (1st in UK, 8th overall) and 2022 (1st in UK, 9th overall);
- Ranked under **Visual Effects and Animation Schools for Production Excellence** in 2019 (2nd in UK, 4^h overall for VFX), 2020 (2nd in UK, 5th overall for VFX), 2021 (1st in UK, 4th overall for both VFX and 3D Animation), and 2022 (2nd in UK, 10th overall for VFX);
- Ranked under **Best Game Design & Development Schools for Production Excellence** in 2019 (1st in UK, 2nd overall for Immersive Media, and 2nd in UK, 9th overall for Console and PC) and 2020 (2nd in UK, 10th overall for Console and PC).

Further accolades include being nominated for **Best Educational Institution** two years in a row in 2021 and 2022 by TIGA, a non-profit trade association representing the UK games industry.⁴ We have also been recognised globally by Animation Career Review, having been ranked⁵ **3rd in UK for Animation** in 2022 (and in 2021), 8th in Europe and 15^h internationally.

PBS has been recognised for its role in supporting small businesses, local economies and student entrepreneurship, becoming the 57th business school in UK and Ireland to be awarded the **Small Business Charter**⁶ *“in recognition of their support for student entrepreneurship, small business and their local economy. It is clear that their commitment to greater entrepreneurial learning and practice is built into the very DNA of the school.”* (Small Business Charter, and Chartered Association of Business Schools)

Size and shape of our provision

Our Business programmes in the data set include a suite of BA (Hons) degrees in Business Management, with specialist pathways in Marketing, Entrepreneurship, Finance, Global Industries and Law. These are complemented by degrees in Law and Accounting, both with integrated Master's options.

Degree apprenticeships (DAs) perfectly embodied the combination of academic rigour and industry engagement at the heart of our mission. We started delivering the Chartered Management Degree Apprenticeship (CMDA) in September 2016 to 20 apprentices, which included apprentices on a highly innovative Rotational Degree Apprenticeship scheme (RDA), co-designed with 6 FTSE 100 companies (Direct Line, IBM, Pearson, Tesco, Unilever and WPP), allowing apprentices to complete 4 rotations in 3 different organisations. The RDA was nominated under the **Innovation – Not-for-profit/Public sector** category at the CIM's Marketing Excellence Awards 2018. By 19/20, we saw

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our UG DA numbers grow to around 180 students, repeatedly attracting high-profile employers like L'Oréal, IBM and TfL. From January 2018, we also offered the Senior Leader Master's Degree Apprenticeship (SLMDA).

The success of our DA offering was recognised externally:

- Shortlisted in the **Best Business Delivering Apprenticeship Programmes** category in the 2019 Westminster Business Council Awards;
- At the RateMyApprenticeship Awards, PCL ranked 40th in the **Top 50 Training Providers** awards in 2021; with 2,000+ training providers registered in the UK, this placed us in the top 2%. PCL was also listed in the top 50 in 2019.

Following reduction in funding bands for the SLMDA and CMDA, and alongside increasing regulation for DAs, we took the strategic decision to cease DA delivery in 2021. We secured a transfer of all continuing learners to the UoK in September 2021, who continued to deliver the same courses.

The industry-focussed offering of ES in VFX, Game Art and Animation, also fits with our mission and our ES UG and integrated Master's degrees commenced in September 2016.

From the 18/19 academic year (AY), we have operated from one campus location in central London. Our students predominantly study full time (FT) and face-to-face. We do not have a student sponsor licence, so our students are mainly drawn from the UK, with a small minority of EU students. Between 17/18 and 20/21, we have seen a year-on-year student growth. For PBS, FT UG applications shifted to DAs, while Law numbers were consistently modest. Creative courses have been steadily growing and ES students currently comprise approximately two thirds of our student population⁷.

Despite our less traditional HE offering, 85.5% of our UG students are under 21 (FT UG 4yr aggregate). 48.7% of our UG entrants are local and our students are more ethnically diverse than the sector as a whole: 50.7% of all students are white compared to 55% in the sector. We have marginally more male students than female students overall. The proportion of our students who have a disability is slightly lower than the sector average⁸.

Entry to ES programmes is through submission of a creative portfolio and participation in a Creative Workshop where students take part in a team exercise and get a flavour of ES learning. This engenders connections between applicants prior to joining, facilitated by the Discord social media tool. Our entry is based on applicants' portfolios rather than tariff points and our HESA data shows our students spread across tariff points. In 18/19, the highest tariff was 176-191 points, with the majority between 80 - 95 points. However, as student numbers have grown, we have seen more students in the higher bands. In 21/22, our HESA data showed entrants with 240+ points, and, for the first time, the majority were in the 160-175 points band.

For PBS programmes, we have two entry routes - tariff points or a Professional Workshop, where applicants undertake group and written exercises and an interview, following online tests in verbal, numerical and abstract reasoning. HESA data shows PBS students are also spread across tariff, with the majority consistently between 80 and 127 tariff points⁹.

The context of the submission

Our students have uploaded a separate independent student submission. In the preparation of our submissions, we have held several meetings with our TEF student contact to offer support and provide contextual information. We have shared drafts of our submission.

2. Student experience

Academic experience and assessment

SE1: Teaching Feedback and Assessment and SE2: Course content and delivery

The design process for our programmes is consistent with our mission and ethos of providing academically demanding, industry-informed courses that inspire students with a real interest in how their chosen discipline plays a role in the modern professional world. To this end a **Degree Concept Team (DCT)** is formed for each programme comprising members from industry/practice, academics (both internal to PCL and external) and students/alumni. Our PBS DCTs have included Unilever, IBM, Lotus Formula 1 and Gowling WLG. For ES, our DCT included P. Franklin, double Oscar-winning VFX supervisor and founder of DNEG, C. Bayliss, Technical Director at Framestore, and T. Saunders, Sony Computer Entertainment. We also include engagement from external academics: for ES this included Professor Joan Ashworth (then Head of Animation at the Royal College of Art). The inclusion of external members is intended to bring independence and objectivity as well as a breadth of expertise and an understanding of the skills and attributes that the relevant industry needs both now and in the future.

The QAA identified the role of the DCTs in developing new programmes as a feature of good practice in our HER (Plus) Review of 2014 and AMR in 2017¹⁰. Following the success of this process, staff, students and industry worked together to develop a studio-based learning methodology which was recognised with a Finalists CATE award from AdvanceHE¹¹ and was noted by QAA in our 2018 AMR. This involved visits to overseas institutions, more interactive DCT events and a series of Studio Projects to prototype the learning, teaching and assessment strategies, first with Escape alumni and then with College students. The process also resulted in a paper entitled *Agile Curriculum Design for the Creative Industries*, presented at the Education track of Eurographics in Lisbon in 2016¹².

Escape Studios

ES programmes espouse a pedagogy centred on professional practice, where tuition, resources and assessment replicate a studio environment¹³. The three integrated MArt/BA programmes have a common first year, which provides a fundamental appreciation of the creative disciplines alongside creative and technical foundations, bringing students from different backgrounds to a common theoretical understanding and practical skill set, and giving a platform on which to develop subject-specific knowledge and skills later in their studies.

Knowledge and skills are developed through research, practical work and analysis, with an emphasis on shared learning and critical reflection. Through individual work and team projects, students progress towards becoming highly skilled practitioners with sound theoretical roots. Students are expected to be engaged in their study, whether in studio/class or independent directed study, for at least 35 hours a week, like in a professional studio. ES students have 15 contact hours per week in classes of approximately 30. In addition to the tutor in class, ES students are supported by studio assistants [See SE5].

Modules generally run in intensive 'blocks' with students able to focus on one at a time. Tutor-led *Craft* modules create an apprentice-like environment where students gain knowledge and subject-specific skills. Tutors and industry professionals contribute to the *Project* modules, which allow students to apply their learning to a client brief and collaborate in an industry-like production. These modules foster intellectual and transferable skills and emphasise the individual's role within the team. Feedback from tutors and peers and self-reflection are critical. ES degree assessments have a

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practical element and a written element (usually a self-reflective retrospective), thereby demonstrating student ability and understanding.

The assessment methodology continues the ethos of academic rigour combined with industry relevance, with marking involving tutors, peers, the students themselves and, for some modules, industry. This ensures programme currency, robust assessment and the development of giving and receiving constructive feedback as a professional skill. Our UG students have had the benefit of feedback from practitioners in award-winning studios including Framestore, DNEG and Aardman Animation.

Formative feedback to students pervades the programmes, with feedback from tutors, studio assistants and peers in the studio. Students participate in 'dailies' - daily feedback sessions on the students' project progress. Following formal presentations, students receive feedback from tutors, peers and professionals in a specially arranged session, which they need to navigate to progress their project. Constructive feedback from industry can be tough to experience but is a valuable developmental phase that helps students to develop resilience for work in the creative industries and to benchmark themselves against professional expectations.

At the end of a module, students receive feedback with their marks, which is written, audio or video recorded and specifically relates to the assessment criteria and marks awarded. Students are explicitly advised to use all these different types of feedback to help them build on their strengths and develop their skills as they progress through their programme.

External examiners (EEs)¹⁴ throughout the AYs 18/19 to 20/21 have commended the ES approach:

"The combination of oral viva, presentation and collaborative critique of art bibles, reflective process reviews and final artefact presentation allows for an authentic assessment experience that is industry facing as well as academically robust. This is excellent practice and the team should be commended. (...) Students are offered industry input on briefs for the group project, which is excellent and shows a commitment to work based learning. In the context of games, where placements are rare, this is very good practice." (ES, 2018/19)

"Work-based or industry inspired learning lies at the core of this programme and is demonstrated to excellent effect throughout." (Escape Studios, 2018/19)

"Some of the best work is better than I have seen at other institutions, which is a testament to the strength of the teaching" (ES, 2019/20)

"As always there was excellent standard of student technical achievement, when compared with other courses in the sector" (Escape Studios, 2020/21)

"The methods of assessment are varied and industry-mirroring and in general are excellent ways of assessing the learning outcomes of the course" (ES, 2019/20)

Pearson Business School

PBS also espouses our mission of industry engagement and relevance with a pedagogy based on authentic learning¹⁵. Like ES, PBS provides a common first year for all business management pathways. Central to this are the Principles of Business modules, which ensure that all students have a firm understanding of the fundamental aspects of a business, including the lifecycle of a business from beginning to end, and an opportunity to contextualise this through real world application, working in small groups to develop a business idea.

Our MLaw Professional Legal Practice programme incorporates the SRA requirements for the Legal Practice Course. Accounting programmes lead to exemptions from the ACCA Fundamentals papers,

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and L7 students on the integrated Master's undertake two Professional level papers for summative assessment, meaning our graduates are already well advanced in gaining their ACCA qualification.

The 'self-managed learning modules' (SMLs), available as a credit-bearing option at each level of our business degrees, allow students to incorporate work-based or entrepreneurial activities within the degree assessment. Students apply learning in a range of settings, in ways appropriate to unique situations which can be bespoke to a particular workplace. The modules also encourage independent learning, along with the research modules which are also incorporated into each level of the degree [See SE3].

Entrepreneurship features strongly with an Entrepreneurship pathway for our Business Management degree, designed for students who want to build their own businesses. Students begin entrepreneurship specialisation at level 5 by starting their own business, which they continue to grow in level 6, ready for a 'Supercharger' event¹⁶ in the final term, where they pitch ideas to potential investors.

PBS takes a 'classroom as consultant' approach in working with start-ups and SMEs, connecting their business needs with teaching and assessment. Direct engagement with SMEs enables students to contextualise their learning and build their professional networks, while SMEs benefit from ideas and insights from Gen Z. Examples include app prototype concepts on the Agile App Design module, research into library user needs, and research into the digitalisation of the legal sector – all for start-up companies on our Start-up in Residence programme (SiR) [See SO5].

Assessment in PBS aligns with the real-world ethos of the programmes and includes report writing, data analysis, teamwork, preparing strategies and presentations. Assessments for SMLs are tailored to specific projects. PBS has collaborated on assessment briefs with employer partners such as Pearson Plc, Adobe, Moët Hennessey and Salesforce.

Since 2018, PBS has continuously refined its approach to assessment feedback, in consultation with students. In 2021, this involved action research with students and tutors, which led to a revised Formative Feedback Policy¹⁷, emphasising the more dynamic and dialogical nature of assessment feedback. The findings were presented at the BERA Annual Conference 2022 titled: *Two Steps Forward One Step Back: Implementing a New Formative Feedback Policy*. The PBS summative feedback practice has been highly commended by external examiners over the past 4 years, with commendations in the 21/22 reports and at the Autumn 2022 examination board: *"Feedback is thorough and helpful for students. I like the 'three action points for improvement' in the feedback I have seen"*¹⁸.

EE endorsements of PBS's assessment practice include:

"The design of the assessments is 'meaningful' reflecting application of theory to real world applications. Where presentations are required the students are encouraged to critique theoretical modules in the contexts of constraints and complexities of real-world scenarios." (PBS, 2018/19)

"The combination of practice law and substantive law throughout the programme is innovative and well-designed for employability outcomes" (PBS, 2018/19)

"A suitable balance between assessments which are vocationally/practice based yet seeking to maintain sound academic standards/practices are set. Assessment criteria are linked to learning outcomes and marking adheres to the marking scheme. Work submitted by students is invariably VERY well presented. High performing students show extensive use of academic materials and are rewarded appropriately with high marks using the top end of the marking schedule." (PBS, 18/19)

"I am impressed by the level and quality of the assessment methods. (PBS, 19/20)

"I would again highlight how much thought went into the design of assessments [to build skills, to ensure inclusivity] and also the detailed feedback from first and second markers/moderators, which is important with collaborative provision/partner institutions." (PBS, 20/21)

"Standards of marking are high. Clear evidence of internal moderation is provided for each module. Samples I have reviewed indicate that work is marked fairly and equitably." (PBS, 21/22)

For both schools, EE reports for the AYs 18/19 to 21/22 comment positively on academic standards and student achievement. Apart from two reports with mixed comments in 19/20, EE reports for all other years are entirely positive on standards. Furthermore, as illustrated in the quotes above, EEs are highly complimentary of the robustness of assessment methods, and their alignment with learning outcomes, the rigour, consistency, and fairness of marking and moderation, the developmental and detailed feedback, and the quality of student work. In annual internal reviews of all reports received in the 20/21 and 21/22 academic years, only positive comments were received on these areas¹⁹.

Our approach to academic integrity consists of educating students about good academic practice, appropriate staff training and a robust academic malpractice policy²⁰. Our provision has evolved with expanded academic support for students: from induction through assessment briefs to study skills tutors and resources. In tandem, our practice on tackling contract cheating has developed, in response to sector concerns, and includes Turnitin Authorship Investigate, and *viva voce* interviews for contract cheating investigations. The effectiveness of our measures is evidenced in the declining numbers of academic malpractice referrals, from 63 in 18/19; 68 in 19/20; 52 in 20/21 and 36 in 21/22, with the majority of cases being minor offences in the first term of study²¹.

We are 5.7%pt below the TEF benchmark for *teaching on my course* for FT students but we are getting closer to benchmark each year. For our DA students, who received the same teaching as our FT business management students, we are not materially below benchmark (-0.8%pt), which suggests this is an area of very high quality.

Our NSS data show that *teaching on my course* has the most consistent and highest overall scores over the 4 years, particularly in relation to Q1: *Staff are good at explaining things* (78.05% in 2022). This scale has also received the most comments from students from 2019 to 2022. The lowest score (except in 2022) is Q4: *My course has challenged me to achieve my best work*, which is incongruous with our outstanding progression outcomes and may be indicative of the pressures felt by students at the time of responding to the survey.

Student comments from our NSS data describe the quality of our teaching as "exceptional", and they appreciate the industry experience and "professionalism of a high standard" of our "amazing" tutors who "provide a unique perspective" into the world of work, and for some students have been "the most valuable part of the course experience". Students value the "insight into the real world of work", "the coverage of hard and soft skills" and the real-world application of their learning. Furthermore, students find our approach "useful", "engaging" and "enjoyable". They feel "challenged academically", "improved intellectually" by their course, "pushed to do their best, and always go beyond", and "prepared to graduate and make the transition into working life". Students "feel privileged" to have been able to study at PCL who, in students' words "do a superb job of bridging the gap between university and post-graduation life".

On *Assessment and feedback* the time series shows significant year-on-year improvement from Year 1 (-12.8%pt) to Year 4 (-1.3%pt). Our most significant improvement is for NSS Q11: *I have received*

helpful comments on my work (from 60.53% in 2019 to 70.1% in 2022), which supports the progress made with feedback. Despite significant progress in enhancing assessment and feedback practice, the NSS results indicate that further work is needed to ensure our students understand the marking process, particularly in relation to groupwork. Groupwork is embedded in all our programmes, as promoting essential workplace skills. This can have mixed reception from students, which our NSS scores reflect. Both schools continuously refine the approach to the marking of groupwork, drawing on pedagogic research, student and employer feedback. This is endorsed by our EEs in comments like: *“the approach to group work is very strong in comparison to other comparable institutions”* (ES, 2021/22).

SE3: Research

We are a teaching- and practice-facing institution, and our Research, Scholarship and Innovation Strategy²² seeks to engender a culture of innovation and creativity that feeds into our pedagogy and benefits students and employers. As described above, we engage employers in the design, delivery and assessment of our programmes.

We define research as the creation and dissemination of new knowledge, understanding or application. It includes creative outputs from ES as well as more traditional research²³. We foster research in knowledge exchange (KE) and employer engagement in HE, authentic learning and employability, and applied projects relating to any of our subject areas. Our creative journey includes industry and academic conferences, articles in academic and trade journals, museum exhibitions and festivals, award-winning games and films and contributions to policy and industry debates.

In 2020, we became one of only 20 higher education institutions in England, and the first ‘alternative provider’, to be awarded a two-year research grant from the Office for Students and Research England for our project, *“Work Integrated Learning: Sustainable models for student-industry engagement”*, which centres on effective models for student–industry KE²⁴.

As part of this project, we put forward a framework for industry-academic educational collaboration that draws out the value of sustained strategic partnerships for industry and students. In the two years of the project, 924 students and 12 employers were involved in KE activities. In partnership with employers like British Library, Moët Hennessy, Salesforce, and SiR start-ups, we tested a range of educational collaboration models in 12 pilots, ranging from employer briefs for graded assessments through mentorship schemes and internships, to student consultancy. Our aim was to develop a framework that embeds KE with industry at the heart of a work-integrated curriculum.

In PBS, organisations ranging from start-ups to multi-national corporations were able to draw on the research and academic capabilities of students via consultancy projects on modules, ‘Dragons’ Den’ style competitions, and internships. As an example, within the People Management and Leadership module assessment, 164 students conducted research and made recommendations to Moët Hennessy on managing a distributed workforce. Twenty students presented their findings to the General Manager of Moët Hennessy Europe, following which Moët Hennessy offered two summer internships and coaching to presenting students.

We also created a specialist Escape Pod studio, where students can develop professional-standard creative work for employers, under the supervision of ES tutors. During the project, students collaborated with the British Library to create an interactive version of the Ebstorf Map for their *Alexander the Great: The Making of a Myth* exhibition²⁵. It is intended that the Escape Pod will become an industry project incubator that benefits students and alumni.

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Our findings confirmed that educational collaboration supports the construction of learning environments through authentic engagement with workplace practices. Through KE, students gain work-relevant experience alongside opportunities to signal competencies to potential employers.²⁶

In 21/22, we presented our project findings at the following conferences: SRHE (21, 22), British Academy of Management (22), European Conference on Educational Research (22), British Educational Research Association (BERA) (22). A BERA blog, published in September 2022, discussed the benefits of KE activities for industry partners²⁷.

Escape Studios

ES has an Advisory Board comprising senior industry representatives from Games, VFX and Animation²⁸, whose role it is to advise at a strategic level of the future direction and needs of the industry to help ensure currency and relevance of our creative offering.

ES is the first, and one of only three, UK-based *Unreal Authorized Training Centres* through Epic Games, creators of Unreal Engine: a games engine now central to games development, film virtual production and real-time animation, placing our tutors at the forefront of developments in these sectors and ensuring currency of programme content. ES is also a Houdini Certified School with SideFX and some of our tutors contribute to the development of this software. Due to our close connections with industry, we understand the skills shortages in the sector. For example, research by ES staff into virtual production has attracted funding from Screenskills to reskill VFX artists, producers and directors in this fast-developing area²⁹.

In the past two years, ES staff have presented at B'Arts International VFX and Arts Fair, Barcelona (20); CGA Belgrade Conference (21); View Conference, Turin, Italy (21); London International Animation Festival (21), FMX, Stuttgart's film, VFX, Games and Digital Media Conference (22).

Ongoing projects include an "Escape Reality" External Virtual Production project with Epic Games, and a game with a focus on Photogrammetry workflows.

Business School

PBS also undertakes research and scholarship at the HE/industry interface with a particular specialism in Work Integrated Learning (WIL).

Over the past two years, PBS faculty have presented on WIL, authentic assessment, skills development, HE pedagogy, programme design and student experience at the AdvanceHE annual conference (19; 21); Chartered Association for Business Schools (20; 21); UALL Work & Learning Network (21); SRHE (21); ASET (21), University of West London Research Symposium; BERA (21; 22); University of Essex Online (21); International Transformative Learning Conference (USA, 22). Many presentations were based on action research with students in the classroom, with the results informing teaching and learning.

Between 18/19 and 21/22, PBS tutors produced scholarly publications, including blogs and papers in refereed journals and book chapters on AI and auditing (*Accountancy Age* magazine), DAs (*University Business*, *Times Higher Education*, *BERA* blog), and how reflection can help students navigate a post-Covid future (*Wonkhe*). They have published articles on self-managed and work-based learning (WBL), reflective, authentic assessment, and leadership and WBL in *Journal of Work Applied Management*. They have investigated WIL and its relevance to skills development, as well as the implementation of WBL in *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*. They have published articles on talent management in private universities in *International Journal of Educational Management*, and collegiality and emotional labour during COVID in *Qualitative Research*. Tutors have also published research on the links between WBL and student attendance and engagement

in *Reflective Practice*. Three tutors co-authored a book chapter on student wellbeing on WIL programmes for the forthcoming *International Handbook of Work-Integrated Learning*. Ongoing projects include action research on providing online study skills student support.

In 2018/19, a team of tutors launched a project investigating the impact of WIL on student experience. Using the SML modules, this research was used to create stronger pedagogic structures on the module. Findings highlighted the key role of skills reflection, later incorporated into compulsory assessment, with student approbation. The team then explored how authentic assessment supported students in their skills development. The project led to multiple publications³⁰ and the SML modules have some of the highest average marks across PBS.

Student Staff Partnerships

Over 2020-22, ES tutors worked with industry and students on successful virtual reality projects of creating an interactive 3D model of the Parthenon as a learning resource for Pearson Italy, and the British Library's Alexander the Great exhibition referenced above. Both projects were praised by their respective commissioning employers. On the Parthenon, *"Thanks to your work with students in designing the environment the result is really astonishing and we're proud of having achieved it together"* (, Digital Literacy and Humanities Product Development, Pearson Italy). On Alexander the Great, *"The students of Escape Studios were a delight to work with. They tackled the brief provided in a highly professional manner and stayed calm in the face challenges such as working with historic maps and tight deadlines. Each student involved brought their own unique perspective and skillset to the project but they worked together seamlessly as a team, learning from each other and taking the time to explain the reasoning behind each decision that had been made during the week. The end product produced by the students was extremely impressive."* (Digital Content Exhibition Curator, British Library).

Between 18/19 and 21/22, PBS staff have collaborated with students in research and have co-presented with 11 students at conferences in Chichester, Lisbon, Oslo, Harvard, and Moscow, with some papers published in conference proceedings. Notably, a PBS alumnus won the best presentation award at the WASET academic conference in Oslo in July 2019. Four PBS alumni have presented original research papers at a Harvard University conference in July 2019.

Our students have also established a TedX community and in 2020 they hosted the first annual TEDxPCL, featuring talks from high-profile entrepreneurs and professionals including . The 2021 TedX featured entrepreneurs .

College Conferences

ES hosts an annual **VFX Festival**, which brings together a creative community of students, tutors and professionals to explore the latest developments in the screen industries. The Festival features insights into award-winning productions, expert-led presentations, careers advice and innovation. In 2020, we organised a VFX Festival Virtual Series of 13 events on award-winning projects and innovation from around the world, which attracted 1000 attendees from 48 countries. In 2021, two specialist festival events were organised for HE/FE students and students under 18 to promote creative careers. Over 4 days, these 2 events had 633 attendees. In 2022, we added a third event: VFX Festival: The Future, covering changes in the creative sector. These hybrid events attracted 249 attendees and 1250+ views were generated on YouTube³¹.

In 2019, PBS hosted and presented at the 42nd International Scientific Conference on Economic and Social Development³². In 2020, PBS launched the inaugural annual **Academic Conference** where staff, industry partners and final-year students present research and scholarly output. The

2021 conference, entitled *Re-Thinking Sustainability, Innovation and Equality in Business*, attracted 60 attendees³³. That year PBS also hosted the *Work Integrated Learning Among Gen Z and Y conference*, supported by the Working Life and Learning Network of the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults (ESREA). ESREA used the conference to launch a new book, *Applications of Work Integrated Learning Among Gen Z and Y Students*, which was co-edited by a PBS tutor. Speakers included the president of the World Association of Cooperative Education, Dr N. Johnston, and academics from Australia, Canada, USA, Italy, and the UK³⁴.

Inspired by our KE research project, we launched an 'Unconference' on WIL in 2022. The main event was attended by over 50 academics, students and employers across 5 continents. It ran 4 streams: academic, student, industry and higher education institution, and provided collaborative opportunities through challenges, podcasts, academic abstracts, and digital posters. Emerald's journal *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning* is hosting a special edition of the academic papers from the Unconference.

Our Enterprise Festival offered a range of events, panels and workshops, on topics such as virtual reality, financing passion projects, and recruiting young talent in a pandemic, to help support SMEs. During Covid-19, 380 people attended the July 2020 virtual event³⁵.

Resources, support and student engagement

SE4: Support for staff professional development

Our commitment to a vibrant academic community is expressed in the Research, Scholarship and Innovation Strategy, the Academic Staff Development Policy, and the Academic Progression Policy³⁶. These place expectations on faculty to: (i) maintain currency, through research, programme design, original work secondments in industry, and higher or professional qualifications; (ii) engage externally with academic and professional communities; and (iii) develop as reflective teaching practitioners to create effective and engaging learning opportunities. Academic staff are expected to develop in all three areas, with flexibility of balance, depending on personal interests and strengths.

We have a mix of full-time staff and associates, which supports our strategy to blend industry and professional experience with academic expertise. As of 31 July 2022, we had 17 permanent ES tutors, and 13 in PBS, plus 8 ES tutors on zero hours contracts, with 22 in PBS, teaching on our degree programmes³⁷. To maintain a balance of expertise in our staff that ensures a blend of academic rigour and professional currency, we support a wide range of activities depending on individual interests and development requirements:

1. Recruitment of faculty with appropriate academic and industry credentials, with a teaching demonstration forming part of the recruitment process³⁸;
2. Scholarly activity is promoted for all staff and centres around maintaining subject and professional currency, pedagogic development, collegiality and external engagement with academia, employers and professional organisations. This is embedded into policy, individual development planning, annual appraisal, review, and academic promotion. Scholarship is valued for its contribution to a richer student experience, for staff professional development, and for industry engagement. In particular, we promote scholarship that contributes to pedagogic innovation and enhancement in the areas of KE and WIL. Academic staff are entitled to a minimum of 12 days per annum for pedagogic development and scholarship, which can be extended based on personal objectives and opportunities;
3. Pedagogic effectiveness is monitored through peer observations and student feedback. We have a target for 65% of academic staff to have achieved either an AdvanceHE fellowship or a PGCertHE within 3 years of joining. A development programme supports tutors with their

- AdvanceHE applications. We monitor the institutional KPI on achieving our AdvanceHE/PGCertHE target at senior committees with the latest (August 22) performance for permanent staff at 61.5%³⁹;
4. Peer Observation is an essential element of our commitment to continuous staff development and the sharing of good practice to enhance teaching quality⁴⁰. New faculty are observed with greater frequency in the beginning. Cross-school peer observations have been introduced over the past two academic years;
 5. Staff are supported to study for higher degrees through a combination of funding and reduced workloads for study time. Currently, 3 colleagues in ES are completing their Master's degrees and one PBS colleague is working towards a PhD;
 6. Support for attendance at conferences and events facilitates engagement with discipline and professional networks and societies;
 7. Schools run *Insights and Innovations* seminar series, where academic staff and external speakers present latest or emerging work. College-organised conferences [SE3] provide opportunities for staff to connect with current debates;
 8. Encouragement and support for staff to publish in trade publications, journals and on social media [See SE3];
 9. Support for faculty working with industry and professional networks on films and other creative productions, CPD courses, joint professional projects and thought leadership. An example is our Head of 3D who was seconded to Framestore for 5 months, worked on several Hollywood films, and brought experience back to ES. In 2021, ES faculty have provided creative direction of Tokyoworld (Sept 2020); Facebook commercial 'Rival Speak' (Los Angeles, June 2021); Sports Direct Oxford St shopwindow projections (2021). ES faculty have designed courses for ILM at Blairgowrie School, Scotland (2020); SideFX international campaign (website) (2021); Summer of Unreal 4-week bootcamp (Epic Games/Unreal, 2021); Framestore (2021). PBS staff also run Business CPD for employers, and during the pandemic, a free PBS course series attracted 150+ attendees.
 10. PBS staff maintain currency by acting as peer reviewers for relevant publications and conferences (e.g. Higher Education Skills, Work Based Learning, Teaching and Learning Inquiry and BERA).
 11. Training days for tutors in learning and teaching, assessment, personal tutoring, learning technology, PCL processes, supporting a diverse student body, and areas like inclusive curriculum; graduate resilience (T. Scurry, Newcastle University); using digital tools for effective teaching and learning; Developing Gen Y competencies for the new work environment (P. Faller, Columbia University); mental health first aid, supporting care leavers;
 12. Memberships of professional networks and associations, with engagement in conferences and CPD, e.g. institutional memberships of TIGA, Chartered Association of Business Schools; Diamond members of Westminster Business Council; 'University' Members of the Institute of Student Employers and individual memberships of BAFTA, RSA, Visual Effects Society, Animation Women UK, Animation Guild, British Cartoonists' Association, SIGGRAPH, IEEE, ACCA, CIMA, British Education Studies Association, SRHE, BERA, British Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, Chartered Institute of Marketing, among others.
 13. Our Principal holds a National Teaching Fellowship and a Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence. A PBS tutor was shortlisted for 'Most Innovative Teacher of the Year' at the 2021 Times Higher Awards⁴¹.

SE5: Learning environment and academic support

As a small College, we are a close-knit community and we are committed to fostering a sense of belonging in our students through a range of initiatives driven by our Student Experience Team and our Access and Participation Plan (APP)⁴². Continuously refined in consultation with students, to support student transition into HE, communications with students prior to joining and Fresher's Welcome Week seek not only to familiarise students with key staff and policies, but also to foster peer connection⁴³. Individual tailored induction is offered to care leavers and students with certain disabilities. Favoured by ES students, our use of Discord, which began during lockdown, provides early access to an online community and is a popular tool to connect with peers and staff, including Student Services. Our student newsletter with campus and industry news, learning and wellbeing suggestions has a regular readership of around 40% of students. The Pearson College Student Association, formed of current students, organises student events, sports, and societies.

In consultation with students, our academic and pastoral support services are continuously enhanced to enable students with a diversity of interests and needs to thrive. Attendance monitoring and follow-on contact are in place, as well as student performance monitoring at the Admissions, Progression, Retention and Achievement Committee and student engagement tracking with the OLE and wider services. Our provision includes personal tutors, study skills tutors, studio assistants, talent development team, student experience team, psychotherapeutic counsellors and an on-site Student Services team with student advisers trained in mental health first aid.

We have an established **Personal Tutor System**⁴⁴, where each student has a tutor to guide their progress. The average allocation is 20 students per personal tutor, depending on expertise, workload and cohort continuity. Following a 2021/22 consultation with tutors and tutees, enhancements to the PTS have improved booking usability, and standardised the focus of initial and subsequent meetings to foster rapport building, alongside the meeting record and action planning⁴⁵.

Students in ES are, additionally, supported by **studio assistants**, often recent ES graduates, themselves experienced artists. Working alongside the tutors in the studio, they support and guide the students' development, providing technical and artistic advice to supplement the theory, knowledge and skills provision. The Studio Assistant scheme is a learning support resource for students of 'near peers' who offer guidance and prompt resolution of issues, whilst also providing a development opportunity for the Studio Assistants themselves.

In 18/19, we introduced **study skills provision** to support students on their academic journey. We employ two full-time study-skills tutors, who provide academic skills workshops and one-to-one support. In response to student demand, the academic workshops in 21/22 focused on improving students' understanding of marking schemes, and appreciation of critical academic discourse. The online bookable one-to-one tutorials with Study Skills tutors enable students to seek practical advice on assignments and transferrable skills. Approximately 25% of students across all levels access Study Skills tuition. The Study Skills OLE page offers academic skills resources which are continuously enriched in consultation with students. Over 20/21 - 21/22 alone, the Study Skills webpage has had 15,411 visits, with peak use throughout term time.⁴⁶

We are committed to promoting and enhancing student well-being in recognition of its impact on student emotional health and achievement⁴⁷. Through the past four years, the focus has been on enhancing mental health and safeguarding provision, alongside supporting students through the Covid-19 pandemic. In 18/19, we established a Counselling Service which has evolved continuously in response to student feedback, and which supports 100 students per annum on average⁴⁸. In the period 18/19 - 21/22, while being a wholly 18+ community, we have evolved our safeguarding

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coordination and support. Students are supported, as appropriate, through PCL services and resources, with external referrals, as appropriate.

Financial assistance at PCL includes a Hardship Fund⁴⁹, loan laptops and a bursary of £1500 for students from care experienced and low-income backgrounds (household income below £25K).

The time series indicator for *academic support* shows that we have been moving closer to benchmark each year. For DAs, who, in addition to the support outlined above, were supported by apprentice mentors with a focus on End Point Assessment preparation, we are above benchmark (+0.9%pt). Our most positive NSS responses have been for Q12: *I have been able to contact staff when I needed to*. Qualitative NSS feedback attests to the “*personal*” and nurturing nature of our academic support with references to the “*real community feel*”, the “*helpful*” and “*supportive*” staff and tutors who “*are always around and available to contact*” and go “*above and beyond for students*”.

Our response to the **Covid-19 situation** is evidence of how nimbly and efficiently we tailor our provision in the best interests of our students. Within 24 hours, all teaching and support provision moved online, including tutor drop-ins, catch-up sessions, Student Services desk, counselling, industry insight and networking events, student movie nights. Solutions were found for students’ access to technology, including laptop loans, software licences and VPN connection to specialist ES software. Working with the UoK, SRA and ACCA, appropriate adjustments to assessments and extenuating circumstances were made to enable remote completion while preserving academic integrity. Additional considerations were made for students with ALN or those who were key workers. Continuous dialogue with students through regular Town Halls helped refine our provision.

External examiners have commended the effectiveness of our Covid-19 measures:

"My thanks go to the university teams at both Pearson and Kent for the clarity and transparency of their response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the effect this will have had on students. I found the explanatory materials provided were excellent and re-assured me as an external examiner that no student would be disadvantaged by the lockdown, and that standards would be maintained" (ES, 2019/20)

"I am also impressed by the way Pearson College London has responded to the COVID 19 crisis promptly and in the best interest of students" (PBS, 2019/20)

"I was impressed with the deft handling of the adjustment to online assessment due to the Coronavirus emergency. The use of online invigilation tools was exemplary and represents a practice other universities should follow" (PBS, 2019/20)

This is confirmed in NSS qualitative data across 2020 and 2021, from both Schools, which describe the transition to online as “*very well done*”, “*managed well*”, “*extremely smooth*”, “*easy and straightforward*”, and “*really supportive and took appropriate measures to ensure students safety*”. Further testament is the fact that not a single formal degree student complaint was made in relation to our Covid-19 handling.

SE6: Virtual and physical resources

Our central London campus within one of the buildings of Pearson Plc places us in the heart of the business district and close to Soho where many creative studios are situated⁵⁰. The design aims to create a professional work-place atmosphere with flexible spaces that enhance collaborative working, which is central to our approach to learning and teaching. This includes large speaker rooms (100 capacity), classrooms (30-50 capacity), ES studios (15-32 capacity), small rooms for staff and/or student meetings (2-6 capacity), collaborative spaces and kitchen facilities with free tea

and coffee where students can congregate and hold informal meetings. All our classrooms have walls which can be written on, enabling the sharing of ideas, sketches and storyboards.

For ES students, we aim to replicate the experience of working in a studio, providing space which can be configured in different ways to support tutor-led learning, collaboration on creative projects, or technical craft individual study. These spaces are accessible outside scheduled learning sessions but restricted to encourage students to manage their time in the studios and their work/life balance. The studios contain industry-standard workstations designed to support rendering and real-time ray tracing, 3D modelling/animation and software/game development including virtual reality. We use high-end, self-calibrating, colour-accurate monitors and deploy Wacom Intuos Pro tablets, which are of professional standard. We install the latest industry-standard software emulating real-world production facilities. This includes Unreal Engine, Houdini, Nuke, Maya, Toon Boom Harmony, Substance Painter, Substance Designer, ZBrush, Photoshop and Reality Capture. To enable ES students to work effectively on their group projects, they have access to a supported Perforce version control system which is used in the creative industries to manage large scale projects. They also have access to a render farm infrastructure which is used in the animation/VFX industry. We have an on-site tech support team.

Our student portal is accessible from a variety of devices via a single sign in, from where students can gain access to (i) the Blackboard Online Learning Environment (OLE) with learning materials and an archive of recorded lectures and webinars (via Panopto); (ii) Library Services, including study skills resources and a fully online library, plus reading lists through TALIS; (iii) our Talent Development Centre with resources and tools for workplace skills, and job and internship opportunities; (iv) links to key student information; (v) timetabling; and (vi) tech support.

Regular staff training and information is given on new features and the effective use of the OLE, alongside topics like digital accessibility, blended learning, using e-portfolios, creating high-quality pre-recorded videos, and using learner analytics.

Besides access to traditional media such as books, magazines and journals, ES students also have a dedicated Vimeo channel with hundreds of tutorials on animation and VFX techniques, including related disciplines such as modelling, rigging, lighting and rendering.

Our TEF indicator for learning resources is the furthest below benchmark, by 20.6%pt. We know, as shown in the Table below, that approximately 20% of our students submit ambivalent (3) scoring answers in this NSS category. Consistently, our lowest scoring question is Q19: *The library resources (e.g. books, online services and learning spaces) have supported my learning well*, which reflects our lack of a physical library commonly seen in more traditional higher education providers. Due to the flexible way in which our learning space is configured, we do not provide fixed computers for general study, aside from the high-specification workstations required for ES. Although we set clear expectations that students must have a laptop prior to commencing their study with us; and we provide laptop loans to students in certain access and participation categories. We know that some students are dissatisfied with the amount of quiet space available on campus, and we have been able to obtain access to dedicated rooms on non-campus floors during assessment periods. In a survey about physical space priorities in summer 2020, only 6 out of 82 responses put individual study space as their first choice. The majority expressed a clear preference to prioritise teaching space, in particular seminars⁵¹.

Our 2021 NSS results scored highest for Q18: *The IT resources and facilities provided have supported my learning well*, a testament to our response to Covid-19; however, this fell in 2022. Our IT provision has been impacted by the lasting effects of Covid-19, with delays in the supply chain

slowing replacements of older workstations and planned improvements to bandwidth to accommodate increased demand on our Wi-Fi. Since its introduction during Covid-19, there has also been increasing demand for remote desktop access to ES workstations, which allows students to remotely access workstations and software in the ES studios.

SE7: Student engagement

True to our mission and values, we embed student engagement in all aspects of our provision and work in partnership with students to influence positive change to the learning experience and environment. Students are represented on our governance committees⁵². We involve students in the design of programmes and decisions on initiatives like Access and Participation planning and delivery, ALN student guidance, bursary evaluation, space re-design, Covid-19 support planning⁵³, Talent Development activities, guest speaker specialisms. The counselling service and the study skills team were expanded in direct response to student demand. Student representatives receive training to assist them with their role and are, further, supported by staff.

Students are able to give feedback on all aspects of learning and teaching via end-of-module questionnaires and end-of-year surveys. Programme-based student fora meet twice a term to facilitate contemporaneous feedback. The results of the questionnaires and Student Voice Forum meetings feed directly into programme monitoring and enhancement of programmes, and ensuing actions are reported back to students for comment and approval.

While below the TEF benchmark on *student voice* for FT UG students, the time series shows that the most recent year of data was much closer to benchmark than previous years. Furthermore, our DAs are slightly above at +0.4%pt. Our NSS data shows we perform best for Q23: *I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course*; however, our students do not always see how feedback has been acted upon, with disappointing scores for Q25: *It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on*. As a small community, many matters are resolved informally and in the moment.

Our APP advances initiatives that contribute to the engagement of students from more disadvantaged backgrounds, including Student Inclusivity and Wellbeing Ambassadors and an inclusivity curriculum project. Inclusivity and Wellbeing Student Ambassadors represent their student constituencies and work on projects that foster an inclusive community and support students from under-represented groups.

Our programme of research on the inclusivity of our curriculum and pedagogy began in 20/21 with a mixed-methods research project on the UG Business Management degree, focussing on ethnicity. The sample was relatively small at 53 but broadly representative by macro-ethnic group. The recommendations for further staff training in discussing race, and in selecting case studies were addressed through AdvanceHE training on race and ethnicity, and additional guest speakers in the 'Evenings With' lecture series.

Appeals and complaints also provide feedback on the students' experience. For the period 18/19 - 21/22, PCL had one complaint referred to the OIA, the outcome of which was 'not eligible'⁵⁴. In total, 4 formal complaints were received in the same period. Appeals to UoK have also been on the decline in the reviewed period with 27 appeals in 2018/19; 15 in 2019/20; 6 in 20/21 and 8 in 2021/22⁵⁵. The small number of complaints overall and the declining numbers of appeals attest to the close relationship that we maintain with our students, who have multiple opportunities for resolution to issues.

We are disappointed by our aggregate metrics for student experience, which are incongruous with our very high-quality continuation and completion outcomes and outstanding progression outcomes. We would highlight the following factors that may have influenced our student experience metrics:

- The timing of the NSS falls at a stressful point of final exams and projects.
- Within a small community, the dissatisfaction of one student has a much greater impact than it would in an institution with a larger population. Similarly, there can be an echo chamber effect which amplifies any negative experiences. With small numbers, our results have seen swings in satisfaction at course or subject level from year to year, which presents a challenge in planning meaningful improvements.
- Our strive for industry relevance includes having tutors with relevant and current industry experience. Due to the buoyant creative industry, this has led to staff recruitment challenges, which have inevitably impacted on the student experience.
- The use of a Likert scale with five answer options has had a significant impact on our overall scores, with ambivalent scores representing, on average, almost one fifth of responses, as shown in the table below.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	Average
Teaching on my course	13.4%	17.9%	18.4%	13.3%	15.7%
Assessment and Feedback	21.3%	18.6%	21.0%	15.6%	19.1%
Academic support	18.7%	18.0%	22.7%	15.4%	18.7%
Learning resources	20.5%	20.7%	19.4%	20.3%	20.2%
Student voice	20.5%	17.3%	25.0%	20.5%	20.8%

An area in which we acknowledge we can improve is our promotion of the NSS, where we are behind our competitors. This has led to missed opportunities in showcasing the positives of the student experience that we offer and closing the feedback loop.

3. Student Outcomes

SO1-SO3: Positive Outcomes

The common first year is an example of how we tailor our approach. This provides flexibility for students to transfer to an alternative pathway without affecting their studies. In designing the ES programmes, this need for a common first year to provide a solid foundation in the different disciplines was considered by industry to be a crucial part of student development.

Further examples of how we tailor our approach include our PBS SML modules, the engagement of industry in assessment and feedback [SE1-3], our KE project [SE3], and academic support measures [SE5]. We would, additionally, highlight our response to Covid-19 [SE5].

Through our governance structure and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), we closely monitor student continuation, timely completion, good honours and Graduate Outcomes. We are immensely proud of our very high-quality continuation and completion outcomes, and outstanding progression outcomes. We believe that these outcomes reflect our consistent focus on bringing authentic learning and employer input into the classroom, as well as our specific programme of talent development and extra-curricular activities and student support.

Our continuation split indicators show that we are consistently close to or above benchmark across the time series for FT UG students, exceeding benchmark by >2.5%pt for mature students and our ES population. Our DA data shows a similar picture, with one exception for a small number (c20) of students aged 31+.

Our completion split indicators show a marked improvement in Year 4 of the time series, for which we only have three years of data. Our business management degrees started in AY14/15 (Y2), with entrepreneurship added in AY16/17 (Y4). Our ES courses began in AY16/17 (Y4). We have poor completion for Other UG, which relates to HND courses discontinued in 2017. As with continuation, our completion data for ES is >2.5%pt above benchmark.

We are >2.5%pt above benchmark for most of our progression split indicators. Our PBS programmes are especially strong, at +9%pt from benchmark. Our DA population also performs strongly for progression, at -0.5%pt from a very high benchmark of 94%. We are significantly below benchmark for Q1 of geography of employment for FT UG, which, as a London-based institution, is unsurprising.

We are also proud of the progress we have made since the institution of our first APP in 19/20. Continuation rates for Black students have risen over the past five years, and in the most recent available year of data, are above our internal target of 90% and at parity with white students. Similarly, while the percentage of our students attaining a first or upper second-class degree has increased modestly overall, this attainment rate increased by 20%pt for Black students specifically, thereby narrowing the awarding gap related to ethnicity⁵⁶.

This also manifests in the split indicators of the TEF dataset. While our small population gives wide statistical confidence distributions for certain student attributes, we meet or exceed our benchmarks for very high quality in continuation, completion and progression when split by ethnicity, disability, ABCS, and IMD. Furthermore, when considering splits in progression outcomes by ethnicity or disability, we are pleased that the indicators are in some cases further above the benchmark for graduates from under-represented groups than for other students. Indeed, the absolute value of the progression indicator for disabled graduates is 85.8%, considerably higher than that of graduates who are not known to be disabled, and 92.0% of the statistical uncertainty distribution for our disabled graduates is materially above the benchmark.

SO4 - SO6: Educational gains

Consistent with our mission to educate future professionals through in-depth industry engagement, we measure educational gains by how effectively we have embedded employability throughout our provision, by the graduate outcomes of our alumni, and by student, industry and external examiner feedback on our professionally-focused programmes.

We articulate our industry focus to prospective and current students⁵⁷ from Day 1 and seek to ensure that all aspects – course design, assessment and feedback, tutor industry expertise, academic support, learning resources, employer partnerships, talent development initiatives, employer mentorship of students, internships and placements, showcase events – are designed to deliver a work-integrated degree and high employability outcomes for students.

Our approaches to supporting students to achieve these gains are detailed under the student experience criteria. Our provision continuously evolves, in consultation with students and employers, as can be evidenced by the dynamic and versatile employability-focused curricular and extra-curricular activities.

Our industry-driven **Talent Development** team delivers career support, events, placements and internships. Events include *Bespoke Industry Days*, with employers like IBM, Microsoft and Tesco; *Lunch 'n' Learn* talks with diverse industry professionals; *Industry Visits* at businesses and studios across London and *Mock Interview Month* with a professional recruiter. In the 2020/21 year alone, 665 students engaged with 45 different industry partners across a variety of events⁵⁸.

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Over the past 4 years, our *internship programme* has supported 495 students to gain an internship within our employer network. In line with our dedication to entrepreneurship, 40 of these have been with start-ups, as part of our SiR programme, with some resulting in permanent positions. Other internships have been with employers such as BBC, Tesco and the Royal Courts of Justice. Speed dating events with London Law firms have led to 6 internships and 2 training contracts with Fladgate LLP. In 21/22, 3 of our students took place in the prestigious (60-place only) Salesforce development programme⁵⁹.

We have pro-actively worked to increase internship engagement for our BAME student community to 44% of internships in 20/21 (from 27% in the previous year). In addition, we sponsor internships where these are not paid by employers, to encourage students to take the opportunities. In 20/21, we funded 112 students on internships.

Some examples of student feedback from their internship experiences are detailed below:

"I have learnt and personally developed a huge amount from my four months spent with [redacted]. Working within such a small company gave me the opportunity to experience many different aspects of business, allowing me to get involved, particularly in client facing situations. I am delighted to be continuing to work with them [redacted]." (Marketing & Business Development Intern, [redacted])

"Having met the founders of [redacted] at a networking event, I was excited to be offered the role of Marketing Executive a week later. Having the opportunity to pitch to companies such as [redacted] has massively improved my confidence. I look forward to continuing my journey at as their new [redacted]." (Marketing Intern, [redacted])

"I was lucky enough to get involved with several of the start-ups-in-residence during my time at university. The skills you learn from working with entrepreneurs are entirely invaluable, and were great at tailoring my tasks to my strengths whilst also pushing me to work on areas of development. All of the internships I did through the internships team at university have set me in good stead to enter the workforce, far beyond my friends at other universities who did not have the same opportunities available." (Research Analyst [redacted])

PBS has partnered with the **International Business School Americas** (IBS) to offer funded places to our students to study abroad and visit employers for three weeks in locations like São Paulo, Milan, New York and California. In January 2022, 5 students went to Brazil and in July 2022, 17 students travelled to Brazil and USA. These were part-funded by the Turing Scheme, recognising their benefit towards social mobility. The IBS programme prepares students for the future world of work, while fostering confidence, resilience, and transferable skills.

Final year ES students have the opportunity to present their final project to staff, peers and industry partners at our annual celebratory **Showcase** event⁶⁰. This is followed by a Q&A session that allows industry partners to interact with students and network. In 21/22, the event was attended by 39 industry partners from 26 studios. In 21/22, we added the 'Best Project Awards', where industry partners voted anonymously for their favourite project for each discipline (VFX, Game Art and Animation). Feedback from our industry partners who attended the 2022 showcase confirms the quality of our students. Some examples include:

"Escape Studios always produces some of the finest VFX graduates in the country. Their whole team is a total pleasure to work with and that clearly rubs off on their students, who carry a diligence and dedication to their craft into the professional environment each year. Their training, both technical and soft skills, stands them in great stead in the industry. It's always great to see

everyone at Escape events and we always end up fighting over the best talent.” ([redacted] , Operations, ETC)

“The End of Year Showcase from Escape Studios was hugely impressive. Not only was the standard of work excellent but the students themselves were incredibly articulate, self-assured and mature. I was especially impressed at the students who'd taken on the producer role. Their schedules and shot tracking systems could rival the production workflows in some top VFX companies! It is testament to the course leaders that these students have already secured employment and will no doubt have successful careers doing something they love.” ([redacted] - Time Based Arts, – [redacted])

“These students presented industry level quality in their projects and had a professional approach when speaking with industry representatives. Their passion and determination to succeed were clear. The staff had a great relationship with their students, giving them the space to take control and provide support when they needed them...” ([redacted] ,Electric Square,Talent Acquisition Specialist)

“The graduates' presentations were phenomenal! The technical talent was strong and the graduate's presentation skills were excellent. Each individual had a high level of maturity and confidence and were able to clearly communicate what they did on the project as well as honestly talk about the things that went wrong and how they fixed them. These professional skills are really important when joining the industry so I was really impressed to see Escape's graduates already equipped!” ([redacted] - ILM - Emerging Talent Specialist)

We organise 'Evenings With' eminent industry representatives, which as well as career insights and aspiration, offer networking opportunities with up to 100 attendees⁶¹.

Our dedication to entrepreneurship has been nurtured through our SiR programme (originally the vision of a final-year PBS student), which enables start-ups, selected by a student panel, to reside within our central London campus for free for 12-months. In return, they work alongside our students to show them how to start and grow a business. The programme includes access to free mentorship from our faculty, industry partners and Entrepreneur in Residence, as well as subsidised internships with PBS students. Since the SiR programme launched in 2018, we have had 11 start-ups involved, ranging from technology companies, through education and marketing agencies, to businesses specialising in human and animal wellness.

“Bright Shift was part of the Pearson Business School start-up in residence programme in 2019-2020 and my business has benefited hugely from working with PBS in a continued partnership ever since. The interns we had were fantastic (one has become the COO of the organisation and the second one as Account Manager) and the learning from their business degree helped our business. They brought fresh ideas and vital human power. It was also very interesting to be involved in course design and in assessment briefs. Doing a degree that has real business embedded in it makes the students very employable. It's been great to be part of that journey.” ([redacted] from Bright/Shift)

Our success is evidenced by the graduate outcomes of our students which, in addition to the outstanding progression indicator, show that, for each year of the survey to date, over 90% of our responding graduates have been in work or further study, with 70% of 19/20 graduates in FT employment, placing us within the top 5% (16 of 319) providers. For 19/20 graduates, 59% of those in FT employment were earning at least £27k a year, compared with 38% for the UK as a whole. This was an increase on 49% for 2018/19 and 51% for 2017/18⁶².

The educational gains of our students are confirmed by the testimonials of employers:

“A quick check revealed that about 10% of all of our employees are Escape alumni! That’s quite a statistic and really speaks to the long standing relationship we have had together and the collaborative and supportive nature of that relationship. Whether it be us providing guest speakers or mentors or Escape supporting us with career development for our teams, we have always found new and important ways to work together on the skills agenda for our industry.” (

Recruitment and Outreach – Framestore)

“It has been a privilege to be involved with Pearson Business School on programme design, internships, Degree Apprenticeships as well as course assignments. We have been impressed by the drive and preparedness of their students. Employability is embedded in the Pearson Business degrees, which include employer-informed practical application. This makes their students versatile and work ready. Following an HR assessment project, we offered paid internships to the best projects as well as coaching sessions. The students were an asset and fitted well. Working with Pearson Business School colleagues has been a pleasure and we value our partnership.”
(Moët Hennessy)

External examiners confirm the robustness and integrity of our educational approach:

“Aligning optionality to current industry specialisms is excellent practice, with cutting edge job specifications an integral part of student strategizing for their own personal career goals. This has been great to see, and student work has flourished accordingly. The course USP of approaching games art as a “craft” is strong and shown in the detailed feedback discussions from staff and industry - particularly on the nuances of the craft such as diegetic storytelling. Overall this course started strongly, and has become even stronger.” (ES, 2020/21)

“Pearson college does have excellent links with external organisations... Due to the programme structure, students do have the opportunity to work on company-based projects - either their employer - or other organisations. These self-managed study modules, consultancy project modules and final project provide great opportunities to apply theoretical understanding of concepts and models to concrete real world situations. I believe these modules are a real strength of the programme.” (PBS, 2020/21)

A testament to the professional standards achieved by our ES UG students are the sector and industry awards and honourable mentions achieved for their projects. Routinely captured in our Dean of Animation’s blog⁶³, there are too many to mention but include:

- *Jerich0* - Multiple awards including highly commended in Film of the Year in VFX at the Rookies 2019. Nominated for a Student BAFTA in 2019 and screened at the London Film Festival 2019;
- *Home Sweet Home* - multiple awards including Best Student Animation at the British Animation Film Festival and screened at the BFI as part of the London Film Festival 2019;
- *Aspen Lane* – Final Year VR project – Runner-up worldwide in Rookies 2020 Immersive Media Game of the Year;
- *Quarantine Chorus* - multiple awards including Best Animated Film of the Year at the Dreamachine International Film Festival 2021 and Best Director Super-Short Film at the Lisbon Film Festival;
- *Minuet* - multiple awards including Best Animation & VFX at Screentest, the National Student Film Festival 2019 and Best Animated Short for Children at the AniFest 2021, the International Film Festival for Children & Young People.

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- *Little Gestures* - Won Best Cine-VFX award in the Global University Film Awards (GUFA) 2022, with a cash prize of \$10,000, among other awards.

In 2022 alone, ES had 71 Escapees who worked on Oscar nominated productions⁶⁴.

PBS student awards include:

- National Apprenticeship Awards 2020, PCL DA Max Tavinor-Kearney awarded the Rising Star Award in the South East Regional Apprenticeship Awards.
- BAME Apprenticeship Awards 2020, three PCL DAs nominated in three separate award categories.
- CMI Apprentice of the Year Award 2019, PCL DA Holly Garrett shortlisted.
- PCL DA Katie Fiddaman was shortlisted for Outstanding Degree Apprentice (Level 6 or 7) in 2019.
- PCL DA, Chris Achiampong awarded London Higher/Degree Apprentice of the Year at the National Apprenticeship Awards Regional Final in 2018; shortlisted for the Apprentice of the Year award at The National Graduate Recruitment Awards and awarded the Chartered Management Institute Apprentice Advocate of the Year.

Conclusion

This document contextualises our commitment to academically stretching and professionally focused higher education, which embeds employability through all aspects of provision. We recognise that our aggregate FT UG student experience indicators are below the very high-quality threshold; however, we would highlight the improvements made across the time series and, in the majority of cases, the very high-quality indicators for our DAs. Our pedagogic approach is commended by employers and external examiners alike for the achievement of our students - in academic standards, and in personal and professional growth. Students appreciate the personal touch of PCL and the career opportunities that studying with us present. Our employability focused degree learning and tailored student support deliver very high-quality continuation and completion outcomes, and outstanding progression outcomes. The impressive list of student awards is a further testament to the strength of our curricular and extra-curricular provision. On the basis of the evidence presented and our interpretation of the TEF criteria, we hope to regain TEF Silver.

"Student achievement was generally excellent. The organization of marks across the course per module but also per student facilitated clear evidence of the distance travelled per student. This was reflected within the specialisms and personal style coming through in the briefs. This is the gold standard of student learning journeys and should be commended." (ES External Examiner, 20/21)

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