

Introduction

Four years on from our 2018 TEF Gold award, we are confident that our teaching, learning and wider student support remain outstanding. Our commitment to achieving such high standards is motivated by our founding principles: the pursuit of academic excellence, the application of learning for social benefit, and equality of opportunity. We have always been a University with a strong social purpose, drawing on the City of York's rich history of action on social justice. Our values and tradition as a 'University for Public Good' remain at the heart of our vision and strategy, positioning us as an inclusive, equitable institution which contributes positively to our community [1]. These principles have guided us through one of the most challenging periods in our history, helping us to continue to deliver outstanding experiences and outcomes for all our students.

Our education empowers our students, nurturing their ambitions to have an impact on society. Since 2017, our core approach to learning and teaching has been the York Pedagogy: a unique, evidence-based framework for curriculum design that stimulates engaging curricula and teaching, develops our students' skills, and emphasises the application of learning to real world issues. Combined with wider student support tailored to student needs and the opportunities available through our current Student Employability Strategy, this approach contributes powerfully to our students' success, progression and educational gain.

We have increased our undergraduate student numbers from 13,655 in 2018 to 15,260 in 2021. As we have grown, we have increased our diversity. 85% of our undergraduate students are from state schools (up from 80% in 2018); 19.6% have a declared disability (up from 14.5% in 2018); 18.1% of our UK-based undergraduates were from Deprivation Quintile 1-2 in 2020/21 (up from 17.4% in 2018); whilst 9.2% had been eligible for free school means (up from 7.9%). 17% of our undergraduates come from outside the UK (up from 13.1% in 2018); and 21.5% across all nationalities are from Black, Asian, Mixed or Other ethnicities (up from 18.7% in 2018).

This growth in diversity is in line with our principle of supporting equality of opportunity and social inclusion. We aspire to be one of the UK's most socially-diverse research-intensive universities. As our Vice Chancellor said in his 2019 inaugural speech - quoting our founding Vice Chancellor - 'including those who have been excluded is a powerful part of our heritage... we should care about that more than almost anything else'. We have multiple initiatives to widen access, create an inclusive learning environment, reduce barriers to student success and therefore enable all students to reach their true potential. Across this submission, we refer to ways in which we support equality of opportunity through inclusive practice and tailored support for specific student groups.

The COVID-19 pandemic put our vision of being a University for Public Good to the test. Within a short time frame our staff transformed teaching and assessment to online formats. We taught in a 'hybrid' format, through asynchronous pre-recorded lectures and virtual learning combined with synchronous online and (when regulations allowed) in-person small group teaching, laboratories and practicals. We also offered online-only variants of some programmes with high numbers of international students. We affirmed our commitment to all members of our community, especially under-represented groups, by extending our existing student support systems. Our success relied on the enormous commitment and creativity of our staff. We were one of the first universities to move back to in-person teaching in 2021/22, as soon as we were safely able to do so.

Reflecting our strong commitment to student partnership, student representatives were members of all COVID-19 decision-making fora, helping to develop new ideas and to ensure we integrated student insight into approaches and initiatives. Our COVID-19 response led us to be shortlisted for

the prestigious *Times Higher* University of the Year award 2021, a submission co-produced with our Students' Union [2]. This recognised our support and care for others, our work in partnership with students and our community, and our actions for the public good.

Our Context and Data

We have a mix of academic departments, schools and interdisciplinary centres, grouped into three Faculties (Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences and Sciences). These only broadly correlate to the TEF subject indicators. Our strategy and policies set clear frameworks for all our programmes: within that, we give significant autonomy to our departments, schools and centres to innovate and deliver outstanding education in ways best suited to their discipline.

We are a research-intensive university and were ranked joint 10th for research quality in REF 2021 (with all subject areas in the top 30) and joint 12th for research impact. A large majority of our academic staff contribute to both outstanding teaching and impactful research, designed to benefit today's society as well as generations to come. We embed research throughout our programmes, developing students' skills to tackle the environmental, societal and global challenges facing our rapidly changing world.

We develop and maintain mutually beneficial partnerships with organisations across a range of sectors - locally, nationally and internationally - to ensure the skills students develop during their studies can be applied after graduation. These partnerships are invaluable in enabling our students to access opportunities for personal and professional development.

Currently all of our undergraduate programmes are full-time. The part-time data provided by OfS - with outstanding rates of Continuation and Completion - almost exclusively relates to sub-programme, modular CPD provision in Nursing. This is out of scope for TEF: its inclusion in the data reflects a national quirk of HESA coding. Integrated masters programmes are offered in all Sciences subjects and in Social Work, accounting for 17% of students in the data. Around 50% of our undergraduate and Integrated masters students are within departments that are accredited by a Professional, Statutory or Regulatory Body (including all in Sciences). This external endorsement of our provision offers additional opportunities for our students after graduation.

With the University of Hull, we have a partnership to run the Hull York Medical School (HYMS). Students are taught by staff at both institutions (facilitated by synchronous video link). This provision appears as 'Medicine' under the TEF data, and not under 'Partnership'. The latter data reflects a former partnership with a local FE College to deliver a Foundation Year. This ended in 2017 and should accordingly be treated as out of scope for TEF; it accounts for around half the data underlying our Foundation Year indicator.

Our case for TEF Gold

The TEF data indicates that we have maintained outstanding provision, consistent with a Gold Award. Four of our eight indicators are at the outstanding level (Continuation, Completion, Academic Support and Learning Resources) and we are above benchmark for the remaining institutional indicators. Excellence is found across our range of subjects and students. 215 of 425 results for our split indicators are either above 95% or are 2.5 points or more above benchmark. This includes over half of our subject-based results, with an average of four outstanding indicators per subject. We were pleased to see our commitment to equality of opportunity reflected in the

data. Across 82 results for 11 indicators¹ relating to under-represented groups and international students, 41 are outstanding and we have no results materially below benchmark.

We developed this narrative in close collaboration with our students. In particular we drew on discussion with our Student Expert Panel, a focus group of 20 students from diverse backgrounds, created in 2019 as one of our key APP projects. The panel serves as an important source of advice across all areas of the University and is heavily involved in our work on access, participation and inclusion. We see this as an exemplar of innovative and best practice. It highlights our commitment to moving from a culture of consultation through to true partnership and developing a more systematic approach to listening to student stories. Students' Union representatives provided ideas as members of our TEF Working Group and commented on and endorsed a draft submission. The Students' Union have also drawn on their own evidence in their independent submission to highlight examples of good practice. Features of excellence appear across this document, regardless of heading. We believe that the TEF data, combined with the evidence below, provides a convincing case for a Gold award.

Student Experience

Inspiring curricula and programmes

Student success at York begins with inspiring curricula and engaging teaching. Since 2017, our programmes have been shaped by the York Pedagogy, our evidence-based approach to integrated curriculum design. The York Pedagogy inspires student engagement and progression via ambitious programme learning outcomes (PLOs). York PLOs are concise, stretching, future-focused and discipline-specific statements of the educational gain available to students in their programmes, informed by consultation with employers. They focus on what students will be able to *do* as a result of their learning. Consequently all our students have clear statements of the disciplinary and transferable skills they will develop, highly relevant to their context and future ambitions - rather than a University-wide statement of educational gain or graduate attributes. Each programme is mapped to ensure that student work, contact time and formative and summative assessment for each module contribute to the progressive achievement of the PLOs and learning is scaffolded through the degree. This approach drew on global evidence on pedagogic best practice [3.1, 4]. This was a significant collaborative effort between academic and educational development staff and won a Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence from Advance HE in 2018.

The results for NSS questions aligned to the aims of the York Pedagogy highlight our success in providing innovative and engaging curricula. In NSS Question 3, *The course is intellectually stimulating*, for each year since 2019 we have scored at least four points above the sector mean and have been ranked in the top quintile of the sector. For NSS Question 5, *The course provides opportunities to explore concepts in depth*, we have scored between 2.41 and 4.11 points above the mean and been ranked in the top quintile each year. One further proxy for our integrated approach to curriculum design is NSS Question 15, *The course is well organised and running smoothly*, for which our results have been an average of 6.2 points above the sector mean across 2019-2022 and in the top quartile of the sector each year [5]. This question sits within the 'Organisation and Management' dimension of NSS. Here, OfS data from early 2022 shows we scored 4.2% above benchmark (n=9,770, response rate 66.1%) across 2018-2021, with outstanding results of 2.5% or more above benchmark each year and in 18 of 25 subject areas [8].

¹ These 11 indicators are: Mature Students 21-30 and 30+; Disabled students; students from Asian, Black, Mixed & Other ethnicities; ABCS Quintile 1; Deprivation IMD Quintile 1-2; non-UK students; and students who were eligible for free school meals.

We achieve these consistently impressive results through a combination of key strategies within our programme design. First, we offer extensive optionality in programmes beyond the first year. This provides opportunities for students to tailor their degree and study the topics they are most enthusiastic about. Within the main single-subject Bachelors programmes in 24 disciplines, second year students take, on average, 40-50 credits of options and are able to choose from between 3 and 11 modules. Third years take on average 70-80 credits of options (c. 60 in the Sciences) across an average of 15-19 modules depending on Faculty; totals vary due to accreditation [7].

Option modules are research-led, delivered by staff at the cutting edge of subject knowledge, and allow students to engage with the most innovative areas of their subjects. For example, Economics offers third year options that are tied to the research of the internationally-renowned Centre for Health Economics. In Social Policy, the interdisciplinary *Social Policy, Crime and Criminal Justice* module matches third year students with a group of people serving custodial sentences in prison. The two groups collaborate to co-create social policy solutions, breaking down barriers and giving all students an insight into different experiences: qualitative feedback in module evaluations is highly positive [3.2]. A further example is the innovative cross-disciplinary *Art Law* module, which engages History of Art and Law students in art law case studies, visits to legal firms and talks from legal professionals. Varied assessment on this module - including presentations and editorials - was praised in 2022 by the external examiner for the way it supports interdisciplinary learning [12].

Students' ability to choose exciting options is supported by our 'clash free' timetable, constructed such that timetabling does not prevent students taking options. This ensures that all students can engage with learning and minimises barriers for those who have external commitments. Its effectiveness is shown by results for NSS Question 16, *The timetable works efficiently for me*. We have been in the top quintile of the sector each year since 2019, consistently scoring at least four points above the mean [5]. This question contributes to the 'Organisation and Management' NSS dimension referred to above, where OfS data shows we had materially above benchmark results across 2018-2021 for students with disabilities (+3.7%; n=1,600); deprivation quintile 1-2 (+5.2%; n=1,650) and those who were eligible for free school meals (+4.6%, n=440) [8].

Second, we are committed to ensuring that York students benefit from our expertise in research and practice, by having opportunities to become knowledge creators themselves. We therefore include capstone research or service-related projects across all our Bachelors and Integrated masters programmes. Students typically choose their own topics, supported by supervision from a staff member who is an expert in that area. Projects provide the culmination of programme learning outcomes such as critical analysis, problem solving and research methods. The effectiveness of projects in driving learning is demonstrated in an analysis of marks data for 2018 and 2019 (n=4,259). Marks for Bachelors projects were 3.1% higher than a weighted average of other modules (ranging from 3.8 in Sciences to 2.3 in Arts and Humanities) and 2.7 higher for Integrated Masters. 69.8% of Bachelors students and 66.2% of Integrated masters students had a higher mark for the project than their average. Through projects and earlier learning, students develop high-level research and analytical skills that allow them to succeed in their future lives. In an alumni survey in 2022, 85% of graduates (n=450) from the past five years agreed their analytical skills had improved due to their degree. These two data sources provide strong evidence of educational gain.

Our third key strategy is to focus on the application of learning to 'real world' settings in programme design. This is reflected in a strong focus on embedding employability (see page 22) and 'real world' content in our curricula. For example, authentic problem-based learning is the core pedagogic approach in Law, with students grouped into small 'law firms' to collaboratively solve

problems from real cases. This approach has featured in 37 of 159 positive open comments for Law in the NSS since 2020, with students highly appreciative of how it builds professional and teamworking skills [5]. Since 2018/19, 255 Law students have also undertaken impactful work with our local community in our Baroness Hale Law Clinic (both an optional module and an extra-curricula opportunity), providing free, high-quality legal advice to 102 members of the public. Real-world learning is similarly embedded in Environment and Geography. First year students participate in 'Flood Week', working together to design and pitch modifications to York's flood defences to the City of York Council and the Environment Agency; whilst a second year core module sees students working with our Estates team to design environmental improvements for our campus. Open comments in module evaluations and in 2019 focus groups (n=17) indicate that students strongly value such real-world content and the tangible impact of their learning [3.6, 9].

We know from deep analyses of NSS 2019 and 2020 Open Comments that these three strategies are beneficial for promoting student engagement. Across both years, the most common positive comments related to course content, structure, quality and choice (36.78% of 1,430 comments in 2019, and 32.32% of 1,383 comments in 2020). The comments focused on final year projects, the ability to shape learning through options and opportunities to study contemporary, relevant, exciting modules [5]. Similar results were found in our 2019 Student Engagement project - a research project co-produced with student interns - which investigated factors influencing students' engagement with learning. This drew on an impressive sample of 244 students from 21 subjects through on-campus research, via quickfire card-sorting, 19 focus groups and 20 1-1 interviews. Students consistently indicated that course content and the ability to tailor their degree powerfully drove their engagement with learning [9].

In our professional programmes in Medicine, Nursing and Midwifery, our students benefit from high quality, practice learning designed collaboratively with local and regional partners - who are the main employers of our graduates. Such opportunities support students' integration of theory and practice while developing their occupational competencies. In Nursing, students' practical skills are developed through extensive use of simulated patient environments (in a dedicated specialist facility) and assessed reflection on practice, stimulated by the use of PebblePad technology to guide, stretch and record learning. The success of these approaches is reflected in very strong results across NSS metrics. Performance in this area has radically improved in the TEF period (all metrics were below benchmark in 2018 [11]), helped by a new model of academic support, revised assessment guidance and additional formative feedback, all based on feedback from students.

The Hull York Medical School (HYMS) supports practical skills via problem-based learning drawn from real cases (supported by small group teaching) and early clinical exposure: both elements are appreciated by students and feature in 20 of 94 positive open comments for HYMS in the NSS since 2020 [5]. Since 2019, the School has also run an innovative, optional year-long, immersive Longitudinal Integrated Clerkship in GP surgeries and hospitals, designed to allow Year 3 students the chance to build long-term rapport with patients. A survey of students undertaking this clerkship showed 90.5% student satisfaction in 2021/22. Thematic analysis of focus groups (n=11) in 2020 revealed an increase in students' confidence and belief in their preparedness for practice [10].

During the pandemic, it was essential for our professional programme students to continue their practice-based learning. Our Professional Programmes Forum ensured the University kept sight of their unique experiences and liaised with regulatory bodies to ensure requirements were met. Swift work to change course structures and graduate our medical school finalists allowed students from Nursing, Midwifery, Social Work and Medicine to work on the frontlines of the pandemic: we are

immensely proud of their efforts. In other disciplines where practical learning is essential, we adopted innovative approaches including virtual field trips and virtual and take-home labs, until restrictions were eased.

Outstanding teaching

We are very proud of the excellent standard of teaching at the University. Our results for the NSS dimension 'Teaching on my Course' have been above the weighted top quartile for the sector each year since 2019. 11 of our 25 subject areas have outstanding results of 2.5% or more above benchmark; 13 are in the top quartile [20]. 8 of 10 indicators relating to under-represented groups and international students are above the sector upper quartile [20], with outstanding results relative to benchmark for students of Black, Mixed and Other ethnicities and students aged 31+. This reflects the University's commitment to widening participation and inclusive learning (pg. 14, 16). Our teaching is delivered by staff who are discipline experts and enthusiasts about learning and is informed by cutting-edge scholarship and research. This inspires our students to develop specialisms and explore critical perspectives within their chosen field. Students are encouraged to pursue their personal interests. Three members of our Student Expert Panel [6] provided examples of academics supporting their wish to tailor their learning through supporting their ability to pursue a specific area of research (English Literature); stretching their learning by being directed to wider literature (History); and by being given access to specialised equipment (Biochemistry).

Small group teaching is a key part of our teaching approach. It enables staff to form personal connections with students and more directly influence and inspire their learning. The benefits to students are evidenced by our NSS scores. For Question 1, *Staff are good at explaining things*, our result has been in the top quartile of the sector (and at least 3 points above the mean) each year since 2019. For NSS Question 2, *Staff have made the subject interesting*, results have been in the top quartile of the sector each year since 2019 (consistently at least 3.7 points above the mean): our result of 82.6% in 2022 placed us 1st in the Russell Group [5]. In our 2019 Student Engagement project (pg. 5), students across disciplines consistently reported that the enthusiasm, approachability and encouragement of staff positively influenced their engagement with learning. Participants also strongly cited the pedagogic benefits of pairwork and small group work in building their confidence and engagement, approaches facilitated by our small group teaching [9].

Our commitment to small group teaching is found not just in seminar-based disciplines, but also in the Sciences and Performing Arts. For example, Biology, Mathematics, Psychology, Engineering and Physics all use small-group problem classes, workshops or tutorials to support learning. In Chemistry, each student belongs to a 'teaching college' in which tutors meet the same small tutorial group of up to 5 students repeatedly across years, building constructive relationships. This system is regularly praised in NSS comments [5]. In Music and Theatre, students collaborate on practical group projects from Year 1, building skills in teamwork and problem solving. Innovatively, Music uses cross-cohort teaching such that new students work together with and learn alongside upper year peers, an approach praised by our 2022 external examiner [12].

Beyond the NSS, student satisfaction with our teaching is strongly evidenced in the 2021 Student Barometer, for which there were 3,165 respondents (21% response rate), of whom 66% were undergraduates and 35% international students. 90% of respondents indicated that they were satisfied with their teaching and learning, with York ranked 1st of 18 participating UK institutions for learning overall and in 8 of 13 questions relating to teaching. 90.5% of respondents were satisfied with the quality of lectures (2.3 points above the UK average), 92.5% with course content (1.6 above average) and 90.4% with support for their learning (3 above average) - we were ranked 1st of

participating UK institutions for all these questions. Reflecting our small group teaching, 94.1% of respondents were satisfied with class sizes, a result that placed us 2nd in the UK [24].

Teaching during the pandemic involved rethinking our approach to how we designed teaching, delivered materials, and produced secure and fair assessment. Examples of staff creativity included global business leaders giving online lectures for our Management students; Archaeology staff providing podcasts with audio descriptions of artefacts; and final year Theatre students producing an assessed Online Monologue Festival. Our approaches were informed by partnership with students. In Biology, for example, weekly module Q&A sessions were introduced to consolidate student learning, whilst teaching approaches were co-constructed with students via regular feedback from interactive polling, surveys and meetings. Psychology similarly implemented new Q&As; focused learning for first and second years on a single topic each day; and introduced new student-led videos with tips for first year students; all refined via cohort-level feedback [14].

These approaches and innovations were informed by an extensive institutional effort to support staff with teaching during the pandemic. In a very short timeframe, colleagues from different specialist teams produced a programme of online workshops and a dedicated VLE site that provided highly detailed, pedagogic guidance on online and hybrid delivery. The workshops were accessed 2,093 times by 540 staff between April 2020 and January 2021. We emphasised student-centred approaches, such as chunking lecture material to consolidate learning; the use of breakout space and collaborative tools to promote interaction; and strategies for effective asynchronous small group teaching. We instigated a series of virtual events in which staff and students could share experiences and tips for teaching and learning in the pandemic [14]. We developed guidance on effective teaching in socially-distanced classrooms, based on empirical testing of different approaches. Our approach was informed by student representatives on committees overseeing these initiatives. Our work had an impact beyond York, with our guidance and innovative adaptations such as virtual fieldwork highlighted as exemplars by the QAA [17].

Approaches introduced in the pandemic continue to drive our innovation. For example, departments such as Biology, Education, Management and Economics have newly adopted 'flipped learning' approaches. Survey results from 2022 (n=281) indicate that students in those departments are more likely (by 15 percentage points) than a comparable set of peers to often use recorded materials to aid assessments and revision, indicating benefits to learning [26].

Assessment and Feedback

The York Pedagogy put a significant emphasis on ensuring that programme learning outcomes were effectively assessed. Formative work and feedback are embedded across our programmes, designed to develop assessment literacy and prepare students for summative assessments. From 2017 to 2019, we undertook significant work to enhance practice in assessment and feedback and improve the clarity of assessment information and guidance, engaging with students to understand their expectations. This influenced our near outstanding (+2.3 above benchmark) result for Assessment and Feedback in 2019. 17 departments used TESTA - an evaluation method which triangulates assessment data, student questionnaires and focus groups - to improve the pattern, volume and alignment of assessment and feedback. This work led to significant improvement in areas such as Nursing (8.1 points below benchmark in 2016, now 2.1 points above); English Studies (5.6 points below benchmark in 2016, now 3.2 points above); and Languages (6.9 points below benchmark in 2017, now 4.6 points above) [11].

In the 2021 Student Barometer, 91.7% of respondents indicated satisfaction with assessment (3.1 above the UK average) and 83.9% with feedback (2.5 above average): in both questions, York was ranked 1st of 18 UK institutions [24]. In 2022, we were also 1st and 2nd in the Russell Group for the NSS questions relating to clarity of marking criteria and fairness of assessment [5]. Seven of our subjects now have outstanding results compared to benchmark for this dimension, with an eighth (Biosciences) very close to it, reflecting excellent practice. In Psychology (+7.9 above benchmark), twenty-seven 'How to' videos have been created to improve students' academic writing and understanding of assessment methods and criteria, informed by scholarship in this area. Focus groups (n=14) strongly indicated that this improved students' assessment literacy [27].

The York Pedagogy promoted student achievement across a more diverse range of PLOs and therefore prompted the inclusion of more diverse forms of assessment. These develop a breadth of academic and transferable skills and promote deep learning by ensuring students cannot succeed through memorisation or by mastering a single assessment type. To give an example, Archaeology develop communication skills by using assessed presentations from Year 1, building to assessed delivery of a lecture and assessed chairing of a seminar in Year 3. Our external examiners recognise the value of our approach. Thirty examiners (22.2%) from all Faculties for 2020/21 offered unprompted positive comments on the imaginative variety of assessment, whilst Archaeology's examiner for 2021/22 described their approach as sector-leading [11].

Despite these successes, our Assessment and Feedback metrics show pockets of underperformance. COVID-19 adversely affected our NSS scores for some subject areas, particularly those which rely on practical assessment. A case in point is Performing Arts, where 2019 Subject TEF data [11] placed us 5 points above benchmark. This reflected immediate, live 1-1 feedback on performance, understandably challenging to replicate online despite the enormous commitment of our staff. Institutionally, our NSS scores were also affected by issues in the timeliness of feedback during the pandemic [5]. Faced with unprecedented pressures on our staff, we relaxed our policy on feedback turnaround times to allow staff time to prioritise the production of online content, teaching delivery and academic support. Feedback is a priority for 2022 with a number of ongoing initiatives in this area, including for example work on standardisation of feedback on cross-disciplinary programmes. We are also taking a longer-term approach by moving to a semester-based curriculum and academic year structure from 2023/24. Our new structure will allow additional, dedicated marking and feedback time and - by reducing the number of modules studied simultaneously - will reduce assessment load, a key issue raised in student feedback.

We took steps to assure students that they would not be materially disadvantaged by the direct or indirect impacts on learning of COVID-19. From Spring 2020, in consultation with our Students' Union, we implemented new Progression and Award Rules (a 'Safety Net'). This offered students the choice of the credit-weighted mean of the summative work that they had completed prior to the first lockdown, or that for the full year, for use as their yearly average. In the 2020/21 academic year, following similar consultation, we implemented an alternative scheme which adjusted the weighting of the degree classification if students continued to be affected by the pandemic. These measures ensured that the achievement of our students did not suffer compared to previous cohorts. Further, we maintained our historic standards despite the challenges posed by the pandemic and experienced only a marginal rise in good honours degrees, unlike many other HEIs, in particular research-intensive organisations [13].

To further mitigate the impact of the pandemic, we amended evidentiary requirements in our Exceptional Circumstances Policy (which allows resits and extensions), allowing unlimited

self-certification for extensions in 2019/20 and 2020/21. We have retained some use of self-certification (a relaxation of our pre-COVID policy), but - in line with OIA guidance - have not continued our pandemic adaptations in full. This was due to concerns that widespread use of self-certified extensions was having adverse impacts on both students' academic study and their mental health and was inhibiting our ability to link our policy to welfare support. This area is under review and we are developing a new, more responsive process with improved links to support.

We instituted online assessment and 24-hour online exams for the 2019/20 and 2020/21 cohorts. This was an inclusive measure: we recognised that students' circumstances in the pandemic might create disadvantages if our previous 3-hour exams were used. Nine external examiners for 2020/21 stated they were impressed by the COVID-19 adaptations to online assessment and all confirmed standards [12]. We believe these interventions were particularly beneficial to our widening participation students. Narrative-based research by our Students' Union into the lived experiences of students from under-represented backgrounds (n=43) in the first lockdown indicated that students appreciated 24-hour exams and felt they promoted deep learning [29]. Our award gap in good honours degrees decreased by 5 points for mature students between 2018/19 and 2020/21, whilst that for students with disabilities reduced to a negligible 0.2 points [13]. Post-COVID, we have maintained a significant number of online and longer exams.

Supporting Professional Development and Academic Practice

Maintaining excellent teaching and exceptional support for student learning across a large institution is rooted in robust, engaging and challenging staff development. At York, we understand that a diverse range of staff - in different roles and with different responsibilities and experience - contribute towards the student experience. We therefore offer wide-ranging and inclusive professional development options at department, Faculty and institution level and highlight the value of evidence-based investigation into practice as a key part of teaching professionalism.

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) are important contributors to student learning at York. All GTAs must complete the *Introduction to Teaching and Learning* course and can apply for the *York Learning and Teaching Award*, a 20-credit Masters level module accredited by Advance HE. In the 2021 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (n=464, response rate 29.5%), the proportion of GTAs who agreed they had received appropriate support for their teaching was 3 points above the sector average.

All staff new to teaching undertake the introductory Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP) - leading to Fellowship of Advance HE. This course embeds the expectations for teaching and learning design set out in our *Statement on Teaching Performance Expectations*; incorporates peer observation cycles; and requires participants to study educational research and investigate their own practice through action research (160 projects were completed between 2019 and 2022). This builds a strong foundation of pedagogically-engaged staff who drive good practice in their own departments. Professional support staff also have their own pathway within PGCAP, which supports professional and academic staff to work together in developing educational skills.

Staff involved in supporting student learning can also engage with the York Professional and Academic Development (YPAD) Scheme, designed to support applications to Advance HE for Fellowship accreditation outside PGCAP. Participants are supported to undertake a piece of pedagogical, evidence-based investigation into their practice. Over the last four years, we have awarded 47 Associate Fellowships, 73 Fellowships and 44 Senior Fellowships through the YPAD

scheme. Our total number of Fellows as a percentage of academic staff has been above the Russell Group average for the past four years (+1.7 in 2021/22) [16].

Through our *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Network* (currently 133 members), we support staff in developing evidence-based practice and their own scholarship of teaching and learning, from idea generation through to dissemination. This includes online resources, a journal club, an in-house journal and a writing group. We offer specific funding for learning and teaching projects. Multiple university-wide outlets allow staff to share pedagogical research and good practice, including our annual Learning and Teaching Conference, Learning and Teaching Forum workshops, our FORUM magazine, and specific fora designed to address key issues, such as Digital Learning and Inclusive Learning. To give an example of how these mechanisms promote improvement, a funded project in Education concerning dialogic teaching was disseminated at our workshops and annual conference. This inspired a subsequent funded project in Theatre, which resulted in a significant increase in student marks and the number of firsts in pilot modules. This scholarship has been externally published and shared at our Forum workshops [15].

Since 2018/19, we have also seen increasing integration of support for evidence-based scholarship of teaching and learning activity at both Faculty level (for example, the annual Faculty of Science Pedagogy and Practice meeting and via Faculty Learning and Teaching Groups) and department level, where various local scholarship groups are active. It has become routine across the University for departments to hold Teaching Away Days to reflect, plan and innovate within their learning and teaching practice. These opportunities for reflection are augmented by Faculty and University monitoring of student experience data, degree outcomes and employability data and other student feedback. Through this, we share good practice, encourage improvements, and assure ourselves that students across subjects and backgrounds succeed at York.

Teaching staff regularly work with professional support colleagues to scrutinise teaching practice in order to develop and innovate. For example, in 2019 Economics used appreciative inquiry and focus groups with students to reflect on its teaching approach. This resulted in the use of more student-centred approaches including flipped learning; interactive polling in lectures and seminars; and the use of Padlet and peer-assisted learning for collaboration. New staff and GTAs receive training and support to adopt the interactive methods used by the department. This had a demonstrable impact on the NSS 'Teaching on My Course' score for Economics, which has improved from 3.9 points below benchmark for 2018 [11] to above benchmark in the latest data.

The importance of teaching and scholarship at York is highlighted in our Recognition and Reward mechanisms. For staff appointed on teaching and research contracts, teaching excellence is given parity with research excellence. We have an established Teaching and Scholarship (T&S) career pathway and currently 32% of our academic staff by headcount (841 staff) are appointed on T&S contracts. The pathway extends to professorial level for those who make an exceptional contribution to teaching. The University currently has fifteen T&S professors, twelve of whom have been promoted internally. We recognise outstanding teaching via the Vice-Chancellor's Teaching Awards and our York University Students' Union (YUSU) Excellence in Teaching and Supervision Awards. We also support colleagues to seek national recognition. Four staff have won National Teaching Fellowships over the last five years, with winners recognised for superb practice such as the innovative use of learning technology; new approaches to the teaching of anatomy; and the development of students' communication skills via work with local schools. The expertise of these colleagues influences practice in their own departments as well as institutional development - through involvement in project groups and leadership of our Learning and Teaching Forum.

Learning Environment - academic support

Our students have access to outstanding academic support that is inclusive and effectively tailored to meet their needs (see also pgs.17-20). This is evidenced by our outstanding score for Academic Support, which is materially above benchmark both overall and for the last two cohorts who were most affected by the pandemic. York's results in this area have been the best of our comparators in the Russell Group each year since 2019. We have outstanding results for 35 out of 52 split indicators, including 14 of our 25 TEF subjects. Our results are above benchmark for every student characteristic and outstanding for 6 of 10 indicators relating to under-represented groups.

Our departments provide high quality learning environments which ensure tailored, personalised, discipline-specific learning support is easily available to students. To ensure academic support meets our students' needs, colleagues in academic departments and central support teams often collaborate to define and deliver programme-specific, academic skills resources and sessions. Our *Statement on Teaching Performance Expectations* further states our expectation that all staff are to be approachable and timely in offering support. Our results for NSS Question 12, *I have been able to contact staff when I needed to*, have been in the top quintile of the sector since 2019 [5].

Every student has an academic supervisor to guide their progress. In the 2021 Student Barometer, 94.5% of respondents indicated satisfaction with personal supervisors, whilst 91.8% were satisfied with communication with tutors (both results ranked 2nd of 18 UK institutions) [24]. Our small group teaching allows staff to build connections with students that create a positive learning environment, providing immediate access to support in the classroom and giving encouragement to approach staff outside it (facilitated by quick responses to queries and dedicated slots for support). A deep analysis of NSS Open Comments in 2019 and 2020 showed that 21% of all positive comments (the third highest category) referred to staff support, with positive comments in every department. The analysis concluded that staff are seen as "approachable, readily available, friendly and helpful" [5].

In addition, we have continued to develop and coordinate our central academic skills support. Our online, fully accessible Skills Guides support the development of digital and academic skills and give all students easy, 24/7 access to a range of resources. There were 35,402 visits to the Guides in 2018/19, rising to 112,931 visits in 2021/22. These have been highlighted by our Student Expert Panel as excellent, accessible resources [6]. Our year-round, interactive workshop programme builds on the Skills Guides and promotes a sense of community among our students. Influenced by ongoing student feedback, the programme content is wide-ranging and progresses from transition sessions to capstone project support workshops for UG students. In 2018/19, there were 9,451 UG bookings for our workshops, rising to approximately 12,000 bookings in 2021/22.

Finally, we offer a suite of 1-1 appointments covering academic writing, mathematics, statistics and numerical reasoning, information literacy, referencing, digital skills and study coaching. These give students personal, tailored support. Uptake for appointments has risen from 978 in 2018/19 to 1,254 in 2021/22. These academic skills development opportunities are signposted via bespoke induction events for departments and specific student groups (under-represented groups and international students - see pgs. 18-20), regular targeted communication and direct contact with our Students' Union and student advocate groups (e.g. the Mature Students Network). In the pandemic, we moved all our academic skills support online, offering access to 24/7 self-help resources; online skills and communication workshops; and Zoom-based one-to-one support.

Spotlight on the International Pathway College (IPC)

Our IPC delivers Level 6 Pre-Masters programmes for international students, preparatory gateways to our Masters provision which also lead to an award. These form our 'other undergraduate' indicators. The programmes offer academic content alongside distinctive language and skills training tailored to students' intended Masters, designed with the target department. All IPC staff have teaching qualifications and - unusually for the sector - are integrated into mechanisms for staff development. Based on student feedback, the IPC won a VC Teaching Award in 2021 for its innovative online delivery during COVID-19, including virtual field trips and laboratories, and bespoke sessions for different time zones. In addition to standard University support and academic supervisors, IPC students benefit from dedicated wrap-around care from a personal tutor in the student support team. The team offers regular 1-1 checks on students' progress and aid practical and cultural transition into life in the UK. This is reflected in outstanding Continuation and Completion indicators, which are both high in absolute terms (+95%) and significantly above benchmark (by 9.2% and 13.4%). Students are highly satisfied: of 76 students who responded across two IPC Academic Experience surveys held in 2021/22 (response rates 77% and 100%), 98.7% agreed that College staff cared about helping them to be successful and 100% were happy with their overall experience.

Learning environment - physical and virtual resources

We have outstanding physical and virtual learning resources that facilitate our teaching and create a supportive environment for student learning. This is an area of strength for York. We are 3.6 points above benchmark overall for *Learning Resources*. For every year since 2019, we have outstanding results relative to benchmark and have also been in the top quintile of the sector [5]. Our results are materially above benchmark in 41 of 52 split indicators (and below in just one), with outstanding performance in 16 of 25 subjects and 8 of 10 indicators relating to under-represented groups. This broad excellence reflects partnerships between our departments, students and professional services and our sustained attention to inclusivity and equality of opportunity.

We continue to prioritise teaching and learning in our development of physical spaces. Our most recent teaching buildings (the Piazza Building on Campus East and Biology T-Block, the Spring Lane Building and the Church Lane Building on Campus West) are modern, multi-functional spaces that support large group teaching and small group working and have numerous break-out spaces to allow students to work together outside the classroom. This reflects close involvement of academic staff and students in the design of these spaces.

Our departmental buildings also often feature communal space to support group learning. In Natural Sciences, for example, dedicated space combined with a regular 'Natural Sciences Hour' acts to bring this interdisciplinary cohort together: the NSS Learning Community results for this subject for 2018-21 were 23 points above benchmark [11]. A number of our departments also engage with the City of York as a learning space, through partnerships with heritage organisations, galleries and civic organisations. This has resulted in initiatives such as *York Crime Walks*, a public resource created by Sociology staff and students with York Museum Trust to explore crime in the city, embedded in our Sociology curriculum through innovative pedagogy based on real-time observations of social problems related to crime.

The University has four libraries which provide access to our collections, electronic learning resources and a range of physical study spaces. Between 2018/19 and 2021/22, our Library was open 24/7, 362 days a year. According to the 2021 Student Barometer, student satisfaction with

library services was 97.2% (2nd of 18 UK institutions); whilst that for IT Services was 95.7% (5.3 points above the UK average and 1st among participating UK institutions) [24].

We employ specific inclusive practices to maintain high levels of student access to our collections whilst minimising additional costs to students. Staff liaise closely to prepare Reading Lists in advance. This enables the vast majority of core texts to be provided online or copies placed in the Core Texts section, supporting wide access. Improvements in journal collection information has enabled students to easily find accessible resources, cited by our Student Expert Panel as excellent inclusive practice [6]. We also adjust purchase numbers for high demand books and engage our user-driven, Flexible Loans model - based on the concept of 'community responsibility' - to adjust the time an item is loaned depending on demand. In 2019, our Academic Liaison Librarians also established a 'Treat your Shelf' textbook initiative which coordinates the free exchange of textbooks between students. These approaches have ensured that our students - whatever their circumstances - have opportunities to access the resources they need, and are correlated with our outstanding results for the Learning Resources metric for Deprivation Quintile 1-2; free school meals; disabled students; non-UK students; and mature students.

To improve Library provision in line with student needs, we combine data from our annual Library Survey with student engagement with a competition around service improvement (LibInspo) and innovative User Experience (UX) approaches. These complement traditional evaluation to yield rich, highly revealing information and encourage productive co-creation between Library staff and students. Student insights have led to the development of an improved Library catalogue user-interface (2019); more casual study space (2020); increased Library facilities catering to the growing undergraduate population in our Campus East student accommodation (2021); and *The Family Room*, a bespoke study space for parents and their children to share, making it easier for student parents to balance study and childcare (2022).

In the pandemic, Library colleagues very swiftly established 'Book Takeaway' remote services, including digitising texts (12,500 unique requests), posting 7,000 books and a 'Click and Collect' socially-distanced book drop off. We worked to redesign Library spaces so that by August 2020 the Library could re-open for socially-distanced study. By the beginning of 2020/2021, the Library buildings and full services were able to re-open with minimal control measures. Our NSS results for Question 19, on the effectiveness of Library resources supporting learning, were respectively 2.1, 4.7 and 2.8 points above the sector mean for 2020 to 2022 and top quartile for 2021 and 2022 [5].

We make extensive use of learning technology to support student learning. To support our academic staff in using online learning and embedding this in programme design, from 2018 we consolidated our central staff responsible for supporting programme design and learning technology. This has allowed our Programme Design and Learning Technology Team (PDLT) to provide staff with pedagogically-focussed support for innovative design of staff-student contact, student work and assessment options via our *Technology-Enhanced Learning Handbook*, workshops and sharing-practice events. For example, the team has encouraged increased use of interactive polling through webinars and case studies, including presentation of student-led research into student experience of polling. This resulted in 2,035 users of Mentimeter by 2022 (rising from 50 in 2017) benefitting student learning - in a 2021 survey of 141 students in Biology and Psychology (response rate c. 7%), 94% indicated they found Mentimeter engaging.

From 2018 we instituted a policy of default lecture recording where pedagogically appropriate, supporting accessible, inclusive teaching and responding to our student's requests for tools to

consolidate learning. This was a major initiative, with considerable work to equip lecture rooms with lecture capture facilities and provide training for academic staff. A 2019 survey (n=541) found that 79% of undergraduates felt this policy had a positive impact on their learning [26]. Our investment in this area positioned us well for the rapid shift to online teaching during COVID-19. Use of lecture recordings to support learning has continued beyond the pandemic. In 2021/22, when we returned to in-person teaching, there were an additional 9,027 users of our recordings relative to pre-pandemic levels (+52%) and over 1m more views of recordings (+152%). We offer professional support for students on how to engage effectively with lectures: there was a 163% increase in unique student uptake of these resources between 2018/19 and 2021/22.

In the early stages of the pandemic, feedback from students indicated that differential access to technology at home was likely to be a barrier to learning. We moved quickly to ensure students did not lose access to learning resources. To provide students with necessary equipment, we issued 102 long-term laptop Loans and 4,527 short-term laptop Loans and in excess of 200 students were also helped with internet connection issues, ensuring they could continue to learn. We arranged a specific VPN service to ensure students in China could access online learning materials. 82% of international students (n=317, 23% response rate) in the 2021 Student Barometer were satisfied with our COVID-19 response, 5 points above the average for the six Russell Group institutions that participated [24]. Our results for NSS Question 18, on IT resources and facilities supporting learning, have been in the top quintile of the sector and at least 4.5 points above the mean each year since 2019. In 2021, 77.2% of students agreed (5.3 above the mean and ranked 20th in the sector), indicating that students felt that we had been effective in making a successful move to online learning. This score increased to 83.16% in 2022 (5.92% over the sector mean), with York ranked 12th in the sector [5].

Our COVID-19 response relied on extensive use of our VLE. In 2021, we conducted a survey on key VLE areas (accessibility; coherence; consistency; clarity; ease of use). Of the 1,633 participants (730 undergraduates), 83% agreed that they were satisfied with the VLE. The 2021 Student Barometer likewise indicated that 89% of students were satisfied with the VLE (2nd of 18 UK institutions), whilst 92.1% were satisfied with online learning materials (1st in the UK) [24]. We are building on this success by rolling out a new VLE from 2023/24, guided by these results.

Our commitment to providing outstanding, inclusive virtual learning resources is demonstrated in our work to meet the new standards set out in the EU Directive on the Accessibility of Public Sector Websites and Mobile Applications in 2020 and 2021. We elected to use the regulations as a springboard to embed inclusive learning materials across the University, conducting work at an unprecedented scale across our community in the midst of the pandemic. We improved the accessibility of all online learning resources, websites and recordings, including high-quality captioning. This was informed by research with a range of student users. Each department created an action plan; over 2,100 staff attended a 2-hour workshop on digital accessibility; and 3,800 staff created individual action statements for their practice as a result of a mandatory staff tutorial. This initiative was co-constructed with over 100 paid student interns. Students undertook key parts of this work including acting as 'change agents' in departments; informing department action plans; creating guides for staff on inclusive lecturing, the use of the VLE and accessible equations; and ensuring the accuracy of captioning. Resources have been made publicly available and extensively shared in the sector, informing practice at other universities. This work was recognised as excellent practice by our Student Expert Panel [6]; via a BlackBoard Catalyst Award for Inclusive Education in 2021; and through a national Advance HE Collaborative Teaching Excellence Award in 2022.

Our students similarly benefit from superb specialist physical and virtual resources. Our results for NSS Question 20, on access to course-specific resources, have been in the top quintile of the sector each year since 2019 and ranged between 2.7 and 6.1 points above the mean [5]. Students in Physics, Chemistry, Biology and Engineering have access to industry-standard laboratories, including highly specialised research facilities such as our Robotics Lab. In the 2021 Student Barometer, 96% of respondents were satisfied with laboratories, a result ranked 1st among participating UK institutions [24]. Dedicated resource guides signpost students to specialist software and e-resources for their discipline. For example, in Languages, our approach of teaching content in the target language (praised as distinctive by our external examiner [12]) is supported by an extensive range of language content in the Library. In English, students have co-developed a working, historic printing press, used to build understanding of the production of texts. History teaching draws on extensive e-resources as well as material housed in our Borthwick Institute for Archives. Students in our School of Arts and Creative Technologies (*Performing Arts*, *Creative Arts* and *Media Studies* in the data) enjoy performance spaces on a par with national venues; industry-standard production studios and equipment such as a motion capture studio; and high-specification PCs, all supporting public work such as our annual Interactive Media showcase.

Students as partners

We are strongly committed to working in partnership with our students. This relationship is enshrined in our *Together York Community Declaration*, co-developed by University staff and students to set out the shared values underpinning our community. Students play an active role in the governance of their programmes, being elected as Course Representatives onto Boards of Studies and Departmental Teaching Committees. We engage students in a variety of ways, including through module and programme evaluations, completing surveys, and Staff-Student Forums (chaired by students in most departments). We place a strong emphasis on the importance of changes to programmes being carefully communicated and informed by widespread student consultation. Our results for NSS Question 17, *Changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively*, have been in the top quintile of the sector each year since 2019 [5].

Eight of our subject areas have outstanding results for Student Voice of 2.5 or more above benchmark, and we are above benchmark overall. Student feedback helps us to drive improvements at department level (there are examples on pages 5, 7, and 10). Our NSS results suggest that students strongly appreciate the multiple opportunities we give to provide feedback - our results for the relevant NSS question (Q. 23) have been in the top quintile of the sector for three of the past four years - but that our responses to feedback are not always as visible as we would wish in some areas [5]. Inspired by good practice in our highest performing departments, such as group-based feedback mechanisms, we are working with our Students' Union to pilot a new approach to student representation based on the concept of a 'People's Assembly'. We are confident that this will improve our results in the subject areas below benchmark.

Our relationship with students goes beyond the forms of feedback measured by the NSS, to a deeper partnership through co-construction of learning and teaching enhancements, student-led projects and forums such as the Student Expert Panel. Multiple examples of this sort of partnership working can be found across this submission (pgs. 5, 7-8, 12-14, 16, 18-20). Further to this, the VC has regular meetings with sabbatical officers, with open agendas to allow honest conversations, shared understanding of problems and co-working on solutions. The Student Voice Group, chaired by Students' Union officers, provides a forum to discuss enhancement of our student voice initiatives and partnership projects with senior staff. Student representatives help take decisions via membership of all our University and Faculty-level teaching-related committees, such as University

Teaching Committee, Faculty Learning and Teaching Groups, and our Standing Committee on Assessment. The importance we place on such representation is demonstrated through the joint staff-student Chairs for Student Life Committee, responsible for policy on wellbeing, the non-academic experience and employability. Student representatives form one-sixth of the members of Senate, our highest academic body, one of the largest proportions in the sector.

Engagement with students was central to the University's COVID-19 response. Student representatives were involved as decision makers in every contingency group, raising key issues to inform our understanding of the impact of the pandemic on diverse student groups and helping to identify solutions. A key example of this was the decision taken on the Safety Net policy (pg. 8), which involved our Students' Union Academic Officer working directly with University staff not only to agree principles but also to help communicate our policy to students. The contingency groups used weekly Pulse Surveys to generate up-to-date insight and inform the wellbeing and academic support interventions instigated during the pandemic. This led, for example, to the introduction of a new Student Wellbeing Officer role in departments (pg. 19) and an additional post to support academic skills provision for international students. These surveys have continued after the pandemic, allowing us to access snapshots of student opinion and give timely responses to student needs. For example, we have recently launched a £6m package of cost-of-living support, informed by Pulse Survey feedback that indicated this was a barrier to academic success.

Subject-specific societies provide a further important way in which student-led academic communities are developed at departmental level - supported by our Students' Union and academic departments with funding and practical support. For example, Psychology and History support student-run academic journals in which students publish their research, whilst the Archaeology Society runs artefact processing events which build students' skills as archaeologists.

The development and implementation of our *Access and Participation Plan* has been enhanced by the active involvement of students from widening participation backgrounds. Student Expert Panel members have led on 'Middle Ground' panel events, a forum to discuss the lived experiences of different groups of students at the University, with a particular focus on race and class. These events involve senior University leaders and have influenced the development of race equality and inclusion initiatives. The students who led the events have been awarded a University of York EDI Impact Award. Students have also been instrumental in designing 'Black Access', a new project that supports Black people with routes into higher education and support in their first year of study.

Partnership working with students has also played an important role in prioritising inclusive learning and teaching. Undergraduate interns have worked with our Inclusive Learning Team to co-construct the staff-facing Inclusive-learning@York Toolkit, (accessed 2,400 times in 2021/22) - including online case studies, resources and reflective questions - and the *Inclusive Learning for Students* MOOC, an online resource for students to reflect on their inclusive learning practices. Students have created resources and workshops on LGBTQ+ within the curriculum, raising awareness among peers and staff. Diversifying and decolonising the curriculum is a key priority, supported by an institutional statement of approach and reflective questions co-produced with students. Staff-student partnerships in 11 departments across all Faculties have conducted significant work in this area, with work in Education cited by our Student Expert Panel as excellent practice [6]. Chemistry's introduction of global approaches and diverse examples and role models in the curriculum has been sector-leading, producing the first open access resource for decolonisation in that discipline [28]. Across the University, students have co-led discussion events on areas which affect learning such as disability and gender and have been significant contributors

to our *Award Gap Project*, researching staff and student perspectives on award gaps and how these can be addressed. We have seen a notable reduction in the award gap for BAME students from 12.3 percentage points in 2017/18 to 4.1 points in 2020/21 [13].

Student Outcomes

We deliver consistently outstanding outcomes for our students. Our Continuation rate of 96.2% is amongst the highest in the sector [20]. 19 of our 24 subject areas have Continuation rates that are above 95% or are materially above benchmark. Our success in supporting equality of opportunity and continuation is reflected in exceptional results across the split indicators: 7 of 11 indicators relating to under-represented groups are above 95% or 2.5 points above the benchmark, with a further two very close to the 95% mark. Our institutional Completion rate of 96.4% is similarly outstanding, with every reported year and 20 of 24 subjects having rates that are either above 95% or materially above benchmark. We have outstanding Completion rates for 5 of the 11 split indicators relating to under-represented groups, whilst a further 5 are above 93% and have absolute rates that are in the top quartile for the sector [20]. Our academic support mechanisms, discussed above, play a key role in supporting student retention. Our performance is further grounded in a number of highly effective practices, discussed below.

Transition and building learning communities

We pay significant attention to students' transition into academic study. This begins prior to their arrival, with 'Preparing to Study' materials and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which we have rolled out for 18 subject areas in the past five years to develop skills before students join us. Our focus is on engaging under-represented audiences, with MOOCs closely tied to our widening access work with schools. This work is based on the success of our original MOOC in Chemistry, which won the Royal Chemistry Society's 2021 Horizon Award for Education. In 2019, to address the specific pre-arrival academic learning concerns of our undergraduate students, we developed an interactive online course - *York's Learning Community* - to introduce the differences between school and University learning and assessment. This course was accessed by 2,436 students across 2020 and 2021, and resulted in very positive comments from student users.

As an embedded part of the implementation of the York Pedagogy, all our programme teams reflected on how to best support the transition of their diverse student cohorts into HE. In Language and Linguistic Science, students from under-represented groups benefit from workshops on adjusting to academic culture and those who have no prior experience of languages are offered specific routes. In Archaeology, a first-year core module on artefacts is focused around team enquiry and is partly delivered via 'hands-on' training at our outdoor *Experimental Archaeology Centre*. Students report that this benefits their sense of belonging whilst nurturing skills in object-handling and critical reflection [3.3]. Across the University, transition is further supported by central skills support teams working with departments at induction events through the first term, so students have clear, timely information concerning our central skills support offer.

We have established effective mechanisms and practices to build engaged learning communities from first year onwards. This reflects educational research that shows that a sense of belonging and peer support are crucial to student continuation and success. OfS data for the 'Learning Community' dimension of NSS shows that we were, respectively, 2.4, 2.0 and 3.2 percentage points above benchmark for 2019 to 2021 - demonstrating our strong performance in this area [8].

Our development of learning communities is supported by our collegiate structure. Every student, whether living on campus or not, is a member of one of eleven Colleges. These act as halls of

residence for the majority of first years. Colleges provide pastoral support and foster a sense of belonging through numerous structured activities where students can meet other students. They make a tangible difference to students' transition into the University and identification as part of our community. Our two Pulse Surveys for October 2022 (n=799, 866) indicated that, just a few weeks in, over three quarters of students felt that they had settled into the University. This was most powerfully influenced by students' forming connections with peers via departments or Colleges (93% had done so), which we support through a peer mentoring scheme in Colleges. Prior survey analysis shows that students who form early peer connections are 50% more likely to report having a good study routine [25].

We also run numerous Student Buddy schemes. Our main scheme - in which new students are paired with a trained upper year peer who gives advice on academic and non-academic aspects of transition - is targeted at under-represented groups through our access initiatives. We strongly promoted this scheme during the pandemic, with 445 students (and 201 buddies) in 2020/21, up from 73 the year before. 87% of students who used this scheme belonged to an under-represented group. In evaluation forms at the end of the Autumn Term 2020 (response rate 52%), 68% of students told us that having a Buddy made them feel more confident about starting university.

The importance of peer support and community at department level was one of the strongest findings arising from our 2019-20 Student Engagement project. Participants revealed that they were both more likely to attend and to feel confident in teaching sessions if they knew other students on their course, whilst students also drew on other students as sources of academic advice. Participants saw these academic communities as being facilitated by small group teaching and group activity, with the departmental examples listed below cited as excellent practice [9].

A significant number of our departments offer activities that are designed to foster belonging whilst also building core academic skills. In Education, for example, all first-year students participate in a non-assessed team exercise to respond to an educational challenge pitched by an external NGO, local business or charity. This develops skills in teamwork, communication and problem-solving in a risk-free environment which has real-world impact, whilst also generating a sense of community [3.5]. Similarly, Environment, Chemistry, Biology and Computer Science all have group-based problem-solving challenges which build learning communities. These approaches are highly effective and all these departments have outstanding Continuation and Completion rates.

We further support learning via Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL) groups in nine subject areas (up from 5 in 2020/21). These study groups, led by second and third year students, are designed to ease the transition of first years by focusing on modules which introduce 'troublesome' threshold concepts. An analysis of the assessment performance of students attending PAL sessions in Biology demonstrated that their marks were significantly higher than their peers on the course, illustrating the scheme's impact [3.4]. Student Engagement project participants from Philosophy, Biology and Environment all cited PAL as supporting their learning [9].

During the pandemic, student feedback gathered in contingency meetings and via Pulse Surveys highlighted the threat posed by lockdown to the maintenance of departmental learning communities. We therefore established a new and ongoing initiative in this area. An undergraduate is now employed in every department as a Department Community Coordinator, to develop events, activities and communication channels which support induction and transition and facilitate students' ability to meet peers and staff. Using a needs analysis for each department, the project is

highly responsive to the needs of students in different disciplines. Based on very positive student feedback, this partnership project was given an Excellence Award in 2022 by our Students' Union.

Specialist Support

Our comprehensive and inclusive approach to student support works to facilitate transition and success for all students. At the same time, we recognise that individual students, and some student groups, experience barriers to fulfilling their potential. We have structures in place that allow us to provide additional support for these students. Beyond the academic support mechanisms already mentioned, our central Student Hub provides 1-1 advice and support on a range of issues that may affect students' progress. Students from specific under-represented groups have personal, named contacts within the Hub who coordinate support for that group, closely linked to our academic support and welfare services. Our coordinated and tailored approach was commended in 2019 in Customer Service Excellence accreditation.

We prioritise student wellbeing, with an ongoing strategy and action plan in this area to drive continuous improvement. Around 7% of our students have a mental health related disability, but - as is common in the sector - many more suffer from mental health issues. In our Student Engagement project, a quarter of the 121 students who participated in quickfire surveys identified mental health as a key factor affecting their academic studies. To address this barrier to success, academic supervisors, college staff, our Counselling Service and Student Wellbeing Officers (embedded in each department) combine to offer holistic welfare support. Student Wellbeing Officers were introduced in 2020 and offer practical advice (over 1,800 referrals in 2021/22) as well as department-specific interventions such as workshops on exam stress. We also have a number of central workshops and online resources to promote students' academic wellbeing, on areas such as stress management. To respond to the pandemic, additional workshops were added during 2020/21 and we introduced ongoing 24/7 online mental health support. Within nine months, 1,999 students had registered for this service and accessed resources, on average, for 30 minutes.

Our distinctive *Support to Study* procedure helps students who are at risk of withdrawal due to significantly adverse health or personal circumstances. This is our sector-leading version of a 'fitness to study' process, strongly focused on supporting students to succeed in their studies rather than managing their withdrawal. Students receive a holistic plan of 1-1 pastoral and academic support from support services and their department. Of 78 students for whom outcomes were known in 2021/22, just 22 withdrew, a notable success given the severity of cases [19].

We offer tailored support for students with specific characteristics. For students recruited through our Widening Access initiatives, we support transition via a free, bespoke pre-arrival induction programme, *Step Ahead*. In a 2021 survey, 98% of attendees (n=216, response rate 81%) agreed that this had led to an increased awareness of support and opportunities at York. Combined with our other sources of support, this initiative supports our high Continuation rates for students from socially deprived backgrounds. Our rate for ABCS quintile 1 is 2.8 points above benchmark; that for students who were eligible for free school meals is outstanding at 95%, whilst that for IMD Quintile 1-2 is, at 94.6%, among the highest in the sector [20].

International students benefit from a specialist support team who offer advice and assistance on transition into life in the UK. Our academic support mechanisms, such as our writing and language workshops and appointments, provide further assistance to students' transition into a new academic culture. Within the past four years, we have also produced targeted resources and initiatives to support international students, such as a 'Recipes for Success' handbook and Global

Consultant buddy scheme, both co-designed by student interns. The success of our work is evident in our Continuation and Completion rates for non-UK students, which are both very high in absolute terms (94.6% and 95.6%) and outstanding relative to benchmark.

We have a specific programme of support for mature students. We hold weekly drop-ins and other events to build a sense of belonging in the group, offer bespoke online resources to support learning, and have a dedicated staff contact who provides 1-1 support. This programme, constructed via sustained engagement with our Mature Students Network, has had a tangible impact on the experience of mature students. Our Student Voice result has increased from 4.5 under benchmark in 2018 (based on all mature students) to 2.6 points above for students aged 31+. We have outstanding results for Academic Support (5.9 points above benchmark, up 4.4 points) and Learning Resources (8.5 above benchmark, up 10.3 points) [11]. Continuation and Completion rates for students aged 21-30 are outstanding relative to benchmark.

For students with disabilities or specific learning difficulties, we offer named-contact advice and leadership on developing Student Support Plans through our Disability Team. Our Continuation rate for students with disabilities is outstanding at 96.3% (marginally higher than non-disabled students, and up from 94.2% in 2018), whilst our Completion rate (94.3%) is 2.4 points above benchmark: both rates are amongst the highest in the sector [11, 20]. Our result for Academic Support is also strong at 2.3 points above benchmark (up from 0.9 in 2018). We have an ongoing action plan to review and improve the academic and non-academic experience of students with disabilities, instigated by and co-created with students on our Student Life Committee.

We are particularly proud of our sector-leading support for students who have experienced time in care or are estranged from their families. We offer bursaries; flexible, year-round accommodation - which is free for care leavers; support and assistance from a dedicated contact and student mentors; an enhanced induction; and guaranteed interviews for our paid student ambassador positions. Peer support groups connect students with others who share common issues through wellbeing drop-in sessions and events: these were extended in the pandemic to provide additional support. This work was cited as good practice by the Office for Students and led to us being shortlisted for a *Times Higher* award for Outstanding Student Support in 2022. Our work for estranged students has been further recognised in an award from the Stand Alone Pledge (2022). Our support for care leavers was cited as exemplary in the 2022 *Independent Review of Children's Social Care*, which noted that our 'personalised and far-reaching approach supports individuals with experience of care to achieve their full potential'.

The COVID-19 pandemic directly tested our support. Taking decisions in partnership with students, we provided care packages and essential supplies to all self-isolating households and followed up all positive tests with details of available University support, making more than 6,000 individual follow-up welfare emails or phone calls. Reacting quickly, we facilitated learning by instituting an emergency fund to support students with the unforeseen costs of the pandemic, one of the first universities to do so. We dedicated c. £2.5m to help more than 4,000 students, 55% of whom had widening participation characteristics. Informal feedback from beneficiaries of this fund indicated that it helped to retain students who would otherwise have withdrawn. This may explain why we did not suffer early problems with retention: our Continuation rate for the 2019/20 entry cohort was outstanding in absolute terms at 97.6% and 2 points above benchmark.

The continuing effectiveness and impact of these measures is evident from internal tracking of our Continuation and Completion rates into the pandemic, which goes beyond the TEF data. Our

Continuation rates remain outstanding, at 96.9% for 2020/21 entrants and 95.6% for 2021/22. Of our 25 TEF subjects, all but one had Continuation rates at 94.5% or above across 2019/20 to 2021/22. This was also the case for students aged 31+, students with disabilities, Asian, Black and Mixed ethnicities, students from outside the UK, IMD Quintile 1-2 and POLAR Quintile 1-2. Our Completion rate was at least 94% overall in each year for graduates up to 2021/22, with no reduction compared to pre-pandemic levels. For the 2018/19 entry cohort, our Completion rate was above 95% in 15 of our 25 TEF subjects, and above 90% in all but 3. Completion rates for Asian students and international students were above 95%. Those for students with disabilities, IMD Quintile 1-2, POLAR Quintile 1-2 and students aged 21-30 were all above 90%: all higher than pre-pandemic levels according to our internal algorithm [18]. This data provides powerful evidence of the success of our COVID-19 response and of the fundamental effectiveness of our student support mechanisms in allowing students of all subjects and backgrounds to thrive at York.

Progression after graduation and educational gain

Our provision ensures that our students continue to succeed after graduation, supporting their ambitions to make a difference to society. Both our overall rate of progression and our results for each year are in the top quartile for the sector [20]. Initiatives to support employability, discussed below, have supported a rise in outcomes from 1.1% above benchmark for 2017/18 graduates to 2.0% for 2019/20. 10 of our 25 subjects have outstanding progression rates of either 95% or more or 2.5% above benchmark. This includes eight subjects in the TEF data plus Medicine and Social Work, which are both at 100% but suppressed in the datasheet. 14 of our subject areas have absolute values that are above the upper quartile for that subject [20]. Our result for Education is misleading: our Educational Studies programmes are benchmarked against initial teacher training, which we do not offer to undergraduates. Whilst not shown in the data, outcomes for international students are impressive, with 87.5% in the past three surveys (n=572) in positive destinations.

As we might expect from their involvement in research, 18% of our students go on to further study, which is 9 points higher than the sector average. This is likely to influence our results for the progression metric: 4.6% of students in the data had undertaken 'interim study', but had yet to secure managerial-level employment. The 2021 and 2022 Longitudinal Educational Outcomes datasets show our success on a longer timescale. 89.5% and 88.9% of our 2015 graduates and 2016 graduates respectively (n=2,615, 2,825) were in sustained employment or further study three years after graduation, with York ranked in the top quartile of over 130 non-specialist HEIs [21]. We believe this figure will increase in light of our more recent work on employability.

Our employment outcomes have been driven by the extensive support we give to all students to help them prepare for their careers, including targeted support for under-represented groups; and by two strategic initiatives which are also central to our approach to educational gain: the York Pedagogy and our current Student Employability Strategy. In 2018, we won awards for the best employability strategy from both the Institute of Student Employers and TargetJobs.

Our Careers and Placements Service works in close partnership with students, academic departments and employers to ensure that our students are best prepared for their future careers. Students have access to extensive development opportunities, 1-1 careers support, employability-focused events and employer fairs. From 2019/20 to 2022/23, 3,468 (13.6%) undergraduates attended 1-1 appointments and 16,025 (64.6%) attended events, workshops and fairs. This provision all moved online in the pandemic. We also offer cutting-edge online support through an AI tool which offers instant feedback on the quality of CVs. Since 2020/21, 6,473 undergraduates have used this service. Employability is a structured part of our academic

supervision meetings, informed by related resources, supervisors check students' progress and direct them to central support. In the 2021 Student Barometer, 76% of respondents were satisfied with careers advice from academic staff, 3 points above the UK average [24].

To help students navigate a changing labour market in the pandemic, in summer 2020 we launched a new virtual careers platform, *Handshake*. This enables students to book appointments and events, build an online profile, network with employers and apply for jobs, with over 5,800 employer profiles. Since launch over 25,000 students and alumni have activated their *Handshake* account and our undergraduate students have made 8,961 job applications through the platform.

We maintain a strategic emphasis on equality of opportunity in our work on employability, as is evident in our strong performance in the student characteristic data. Out of 10 indicators relating to under-represented groups, 7 are 2.5% or more above the benchmark and we are top quartile in 8 [20]. Our performance for Deprivation Quintile 1-2, ABCS Quintile 1 and students who were eligible for free school meals shows our success in supporting those who are at the highest disadvantage. This success reflects a number of initiatives to help students from specific groups succeed in the labour market. To reduce financial barriers, in 2018/19 we created *York Futures Scholarships* which provide non-repayable cash bursaries (to mitigate travel and placement costs) for students undertaking work-related opportunities. We have subsequently disbursed over £500,000 over 686 awards, with every recipient meeting at least one widening participation characteristic. For students on the autistic spectrum, we run an 8-week training programme of 1-1 coaching. Since 2020/21 we have also run a coaching programme open to all final year students from a widening participation background. In a survey of the pilot cohort, 96.4% of students (n=28, 50% response rate) recommended this programme. We have since extended this offer to over 100 students.

As part of the York Pedagogy implementation, each programme clearly articulates a statement to students on how programmes develop employability, informed by consultation with employers. To further embed employability within degrees, a member of academic staff in each department acts as the Careers and Employability Coordinator, working with our central Careers team. The result has been a significant expansion in curriculum-based activities which build personal or professional skills, tailored to disciplinary contexts. Our approach has been informed by a recognition that students enter university with varying levels of social and professional capital and confidence. This can act as a barrier to engagement with central Careers support, particularly for students from under-represented backgrounds and international students. Developing skills through the curriculum is an important way we realise our commitment to equality of opportunity. The following examples help to illustrate how our programmes support employability:

- In Engineering (5 points above benchmark for progression), group-based practical projects are embedded across all years, including a third year, core module in which students form a company, tender ideas, produce marketing plans and design, code and test software.
- A first year module in Biology (7.1 points above benchmark) includes a 'Grand Challenge' component requiring over 200 students to work in teams on bioindustry challenges. Their solutions are presented in professional report format and are questioned by relevant professionals.
- All first year Psychology students tackle a challenge posed by the 'Transform Partnership' of public sector organisations. Tasks have included such issues as knife crime and students are required to present their responses via video presentations.

- In Management, students build key skills in teamwork, pitching business ideas and business planning from the first year, aided by extensive use of real-world case studies and group activities. This culminates in presenting an assessed business case under pressure as a team. Students also have opportunities to work with real clients through consultancy. This contributes to an outstanding progression result (8.2 points above benchmark).
- In Music, a core module focuses on developing entrepreneurial and professional skills in time management, teamwork, budgeting and confidence under pressure.
- In Film and TV Production (*Creative Arts* in the data), core modules in successive years develop professional skills by simulating industry practice, such as creating a game show or film. The programme also benefits from strong collaborations with industry partners and masterclasses from experts. With an absolute result (70.7%) significantly above the weighted top quartile for this subject area [20], our below benchmark result here is highly misleading. Survey data shows that 13 of the 34 students who have 'negative destinations' are working in the film or media industry in entry-level roles, such as production runners, an intended outcome for the course [22]. If counted positively, our rate here would be above benchmark. The accrediting body for this programme, Screenskills, has praised the level of employment into the industry as 'very impressive'.

This in-department provision is complemented by a number of central Student Employability Strategy initiatives. These aim to provide effective, inclusive support and development opportunities to all students to prepare them for graduate success. One key initiative is the *York Strengths Programme*. This central programme is heavily promoted by our academic departments, in some cases via inclusion in the curriculum. It consists of an online self-assessment course which enables students to explore and identify their most positive employability characteristics. Students can then attend a 'Development Day', involving group activities with a trained observer who provides personal feedback to students on their skills. In 2021/22, 1,600 students (c. 12% of our population) completed the online self-assessment and 729 attended a Development Day. Internal data shows that students who attend a Development Day go on to attend double the number of our central employability-enhancing opportunities when compared to their peers. As measured in annual enrolment surveys, they are also more likely - by ten percentage points - to report undertaking work experience in the following 12 months.

Second and third year students can also engage with *The York Award*. This provides recognition of personal and professional development, such as experiences of teamwork and leadership in programmes, our Colleges, student societies and volunteering. Participating in the *York Award* helps students articulate the positive characteristics they have to offer. An internal analysis of the Graduate Outcome survey has shown that positive destinations were 2 points higher for those who gained a *York Award* from 2019-20 to 2021-22 than those without it [22].

We have increased opportunities for students across the University to take a Year in Employment as part of their degree. Across the TEF period, 1,280 students were registered on additional years in employment (c. 6.3% of all students). This has been a long-established part of our provision (e.g. in Engineering, Biology, Management, Computer Science and Chemistry - influencing high rates of progression in these disciplines). Based on data that showed this had a significant impact on graduate success, in 2018/19 we introduced a new initiative to allow students from any discipline area to take an additional placement year, supported by a new central team. Uptake of this central initiative has risen from 24 students in 2018/19 to 90 students in 2021/22, spanning 14 departments. The impact of these initiatives is shown by data from the past three Graduate

Outcomes surveys, in which the positive destinations score is 15.3 points higher for graduates who took a Year in Employment [22].

We support student engagement in short-term opportunities, including volunteering and paid internships. In 2021-22, there were 1,899 volunteering opportunities and 140 paid internships, the latter involving 46 regional businesses as well as internal internships on student partnership projects. Our Strategy set an objective to increase the number of students with protected characteristics engaging in such opportunities and we are delivering outstanding success in this area: 64% of the student interns hired in 2021/22 were from widening participation backgrounds, significantly higher than might be expected from our population. Our work to promote and secure work opportunities is appreciated by students. In the 2021 Student Barometer, 77% of students were satisfied with opportunities for work experience, 5.2 points above the UK average [24].

Reflecting our commitment to the public good, we run structured activities which connect students with local community partners. Since 2018/19, 1,799 students have participated in *York Students into Schools*, gaining valuable work experience by supporting learning in local schools. Over the past two years, a further 736 undergraduates have worked with local organisations and charities via the OfS-funded Community Projects, developing their personal and professional skills whilst making a positive social impact. Of 17 partners who responded to a recent survey, 16 felt that students had completed the project brief well, with 10 saying that the students' work had been very or vitally important to their organisation. Projects have included an innovative Sustainability Clinic (inspired by our Law clinic) to help 10 local businesses and charities address their environmental impact, piloted with 74 undergraduates. From 2023/24, this will be offered as a credit-bearing module for undergraduates across the University. In 2021/22, over 100 History students worked with York Archaeological Trust to curate new ways of displaying items and provide learning materials for school students. Such placements now form a core second year module.

These initiatives have a highly positive, measurable impact on educational gain. For Community Projects, pre-and post-project surveys showed that the proportion of students confident about their future careers increased by 17.46% in 2020/21 (n=74) and 19% in 2021/22 (n=43). The surveys further show statistically significant learning gain across each of 10 skill areas. For example, in 2020/21 the proportion of students who were confident about *Negotiating with others*, *Presenting to an audience* and *Overcoming setbacks* grew by 12, 12 and 11 points respectively. For York Students into Schools, 20 students completed pre-and post-project surveys of learning gain in 2019/20. Though a small sample size, this showed that students' confidence in each of 16 skill areas increased. For example, on average students' confidence in *Communicating with others* and *Organising their time* increased by 0.33 and 0.41 respectively on a 5-point Likert scale [23].

Conclusion

As outlined in the Introduction to this submission, the University of York's purpose and values are enshrined in our founding principles - the application of learning for social benefit, equality of opportunity and academic excellence. This submission illustrates how these principles inform and guide our provision of an outstanding student experience and the achievement of outstanding student outcomes for all our students. We believe that the TEF data provided, combined with the evidence set out in this submission, provides compelling evidence for a TEF Gold award.

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