

University Context: Values, Mission and Strategy

At the University of Worcester (UW) we are proud of our **international reputation for inclusion** and our **outstanding record on student engagement and employability**. These are at the heart of our approach to excellence in learning and teaching, which prioritises academic engagement, experiential and applied learning, and the nurturing and development of the whole student, recognising that each student is a unique and valued member of the academic community. These principles also underpin the learning environment of the University, encouraging educational innovation, professional development and the interlinking of teaching and research. Our students value the friendliness and responsiveness that make a personalised educational experience fundamental to academic success and excellent outcomes for all. Our values guide our priorities as a University and we make them explicit to students, staff, and external partners and communities.

University of Worcester Values (from the University's Strategic Plan 2013-2018)

- intellectual openness, honesty and love of learning
- human equality and dignity
- democracy and mutual respect
- educational and social inclusion
- environmental sustainability and social responsibility
- ethical and professional behaviour, and
- active engagement and partnership.

These values translate into a mission, explicitly stated in the University's Strategic Plan, to be an outstanding University at which to be a student. We achieve this mission by motivating and empowering our students, graduates and staff to make a first rate contribution to society, and by inspiring our students to reach their full potential through excellent, innovative teaching, scholarship and research. The University's strategy has been both ambitious and successful in terms of growth in student numbers. We have expanded by developing our course profile across a broad base, and by developing collaborative relationships with educational partners that help to support our widening participation goals. Our academic offering includes education, health and social care, the life sciences, sports science, law, and a wide range of social science, arts, humanities and business subject areas.

At the heart of our **Learning and Teaching Strategy** (2015-2018) is the Institution's motto, adopted on our foundation in 1946: **We Aspire to Inspire**. The six key goals of our Strategy express this aspiration:

1. To ensure students benefit from **inspirational, intellectually challenging and inclusive teaching and learning** underpinned by first rate learning environments and resources
2. To design **contemporary and relevant course curricula** offering students learning experiences that are research-informed and promote enquiry based learning and critical thinking
3. To equip students to fulfil their potential and become **lifelong learners, with capabilities for employability, enterprise creation and continuing professional development** that enable them to be successful
4. To engage **students as partners in planning, managing and enhancing learning experiences**, and in so doing, support them to develop professional and ethical behaviours consistent with University values
5. To provide **effective Personal Academic Tutoring and support systems** ensuring high rates of student retention, progression and achievement

6. To adopt a **strategic and purposeful approach to the development of technology enhanced learning** that will significantly impact on the **digital capabilities** of all staff and students of the University.

Preparation of the University of Worcester submission

This submission has been prepared by a small group of academic and professional services staff and Students' Union officers, working together to ensure that the submission reflects our highly inclusive partnership approach. The Students' Union also drafted part of this submission. It has been prepared by drawing on a wide range of evidence, including that from external sources and endorsements, internal student and staff surveys, institutional and departmental annual reports, and analysis of other existing data. In 2015/16 the University and Students' Union undertook a joint project to explore what students and staff consider to be excellent teaching and learning, and how this was delivered at Worcester. The whole University community, both teaching and non-teaching staff and students, was invited to express views, and these were collated and fed into an all staff conference on teaching excellence. In addition, the Board of Governors participated in a workshop session with the University Executive on the TEF and has been regularly updated on our progress. The submission has also been endorsed by the Academic Board.

Coding Error Impacting on Minority Mode Metrics

Our metrics for minority mode (part-time) students require specific mention at the outset. These students constitute just 14% of the total student headcount. Our investigation of the courses and students covered by these metrics over the three-year period has established that there was a fundamental error in the coding of over half the students reflected in this cohort. 55% of these students were enrolled for individual modules related to a continuing professional development programme for those working in professions allied to medicine, including short courses on Non-Medical Prescribing, and Dementia and Palliative Care. These students were erroneously registered for the full part-time BSc 'top-up' programme in the first two years covered by the data and consequently appear incorrectly as non-continuers. In reality, they were only ever registered for a single module, which they passed. This isolated issue was resolved by year 3, which is evidenced by the large drop in the non-continuation indicator (to 20%, from 43% and 48% in years 1 and 2 respectively). The part-time mode core and split metrics are positively flagged for highly skilled employment and further study - this data relates to the same students, who are studying whilst also in highly skilled professional employment such as nursing and midwifery.

A. Teaching Quality

Our strengths in this respect are:

- Sector leading strategies for assessment and feedback which placed UW student satisfaction in 2016 at 76% against a sector average of 73% [TQ4]
- Outstanding student engagement across the University, as evidenced by our student representation programme, with 1 in 20 students volunteering as a student representative [TQ1]
- Sector leading strategies for engaging students with learning through inclusive, personalised interactive and experiential teaching and learning, with top quartile NSS results for course delivery and collaborative learning questions [TQ1]
- Consistent and longstanding engagement of employers, professional and community organisations in curriculum and assessment design and delivery, with evidence of outstanding stretch and rigour from external examiner and Professional Statutory and Regulatory Body reports. 89% of students in our 2016 internal survey said that their course had challenged them to do their best work [TQ3, SO1]

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- Optimal contact hours and personalised approaches to learning support that secure high levels of engagement and commitment to study, as evidenced by top quartile NSS results for learning community questions [TQ1, TQ3]
- Consistent and embedded culture and approach to recognising and rewarding excellent teaching, from staff recruitment through to promotion, appraisal, continuing professional development and teaching awards [TQ2].

We regularly ask our students and staff to tell us what they consider to be 'excellent teaching', and what makes teaching excellent at UW. In 2015, responses were sought via a request for comments to be posted to an '**excellence tree**' on each of the University's campuses. This unusual way of gathering thoughts seems to have captured the imagination of both students and staff, and we had several hundred responses, hung as "leaves" on the tree. It was evident that what students value are the relationships they build with academic staff, the personalised approach to learning that is developed, the enthusiasm, clarity and depth of knowledge communicated by staff, and the commitment to their personal development. Many of the comments received indicated that students perceive teaching at the University to combine challenge, personal support and love of learning: we believe that this is a welcome endorsement of our inclusive and personalised approach to educating students, as the following comments collected from students in the process show:

- *The strong relationships you build over the year; expert feedback and advice; quality support; achievable challenge*
- *From my own personal experience teaching has a focus that is kept clearly on improving student outcomes, feedback from the lecturers are related to clear specific and challenging goals for the student. This promotes sustainable learning*
- *Lecturers are really enthusiastic about their subjects and try really hard to enthuse students. Very good feedback*
- *Committed staff that are invested in your development as a human/individual, not just a grade or statistic.*

This commitment to high quality **inclusive and personalised learning** is underpinned by a fundamental conviction that our undergraduate programmes must be effective in preparing students for graduate employment, further study and lifelong learning, and that student success is associated with high levels of student engagement. We value students as members of the University and as active participants in the processes and structures that govern their educational experience. Our staff engage in outreach work with young people to raise aspirations for higher education and to ensure that they make the right decisions about where and what to study. We were awarded a HELOA Innovation and Best Practice award in 2014 for our outstanding and innovative work in this respect. We run interactive open and visit days with 'taster activities', workshops, one to one meetings for students with academic staff, and the opportunity to speak to current students to learn of their experience. We also engage with students pre-arrival by means of social media and hold specific information days and transition workshops for mature students and for disabled students to build confidence and give students opportunities to network and develop friendships even before they join us. The effectiveness of this approach is demonstrated by the fact that, for the 2015 mature student group, no student attending a workshop withdrew from the University. Fostering a **sense of belonging** is key to our comprehensive student induction which we deliver together with our Students' Union and which we regard as extending throughout the first year.

We champion **activity based and experiential learning** and involve external practitioners, employers and professional organisations, both in the accreditation and endorsement of our programmes and in their delivery. This has been identified as good practice by all recent professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) accreditations and endorsements, such as the Chartered Institute of Forensic Sciences, the Royal Geographical Society and the Royal Society of Biology. 44% of our undergraduate students are studying on **PSRB accredited** courses. Effective and productive partnership working with schools, Health Trusts and associated organisations is also a recurring theme of our most recent Ofsted inspection of teacher training programmes and monitoring and accreditation reports from PSRBs in the health professions.

Student feedback through **module 'health checks'** and **centrally managed evaluations**, together with an annual internal Student Survey, are important mechanisms for hearing and valuing the student voice and enhancing the educational experience. We have well embedded strategies for ensuring that the feedback loop is closed by asking all module tutors and course leaders to respond to surveys in sessions and via the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). This is evidenced by NSS results in relation to the question bank on feedback from students where satisfaction for UW is 73% against 68% for English HE providers. Our collaborative partnership working between staff and students is also reflected in both our approach to contact hours and our course design policies and processes.

Contact hours

Our approach to contact hours incorporates the **whole student learning experience**. We aim to encourage our students to become effective independent learners. The formal teaching experience is crucial to this process, but we also recognise that much student learning happens outside of the classroom. We set high expectations, encourage good study habits, collaborative working and the integration of teaching, learning and assessment to support student academic and professional development in structured and supportive ways. We know from student feedback that our students appreciate and value this. Contact time is scaffolded: usually higher in the initial years of an undergraduate programme, providing the skills development for independent learning in the final year. Most first and second year students will have between 12 and 15 hours of class contact per week; students on science, sport or other practice based courses where a significant element of teaching involves laboratory or field-work, usually have 15 to 20 hours of contact per week. Over half of our students are on courses leading to professions in health, social care or education, and they will spend a high proportion of their learning time in work-based learning settings with mentors.

We recently undertook a series of focus groups with first year students to ask them about their experience of their first six weeks with us. Students confirmed that subject staff made very clear the expectations for independent and directed study outside of class contact time, and the availability of drop-in sessions to help with study issues. It is pleasing to note that all students in the focus groups had also experienced formative assessment within the first six weeks.

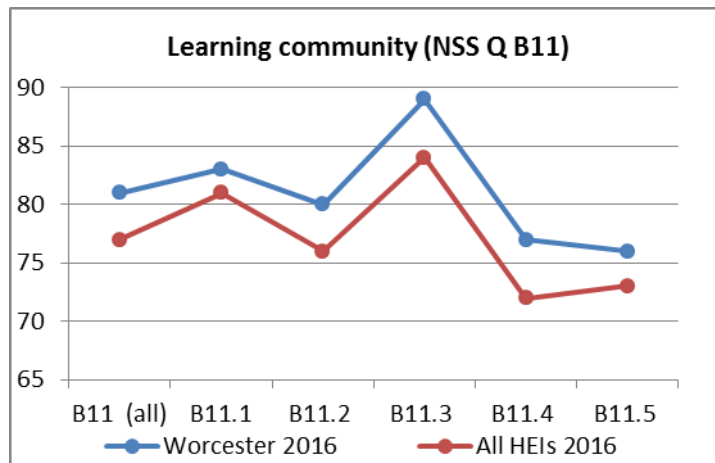
Course design and development: challenge and rigour

Our **Curriculum Design Policy** ensures that staff prioritise and engage with enquiry based learning and the development of critical thinking, together with structured support for students to develop as independent learners over the course of their studies. It also requires staff to devise curricula which develop student employability, including international understanding and cultural awareness to enable students to be inclusive in their actions and value diversity. This is achieved through the specification of learning outcomes relating to knowledge and understanding, cognitive and intellectual skills, and employability and transferable skills. Our undergraduate programmes include opportunities for work experience or work-based learning and for international exchange and study abroad, and all undergraduate programmes include a major independent project or equivalent assessment item in the final year.

The **course design** and **periodic review processes** evaluate course proposals and developments against the Curriculum Design Policy, and consider the potential or actual impact on student engagement and outcomes. Both processes require the involvement of employers, of students and of external academics from other HE providers to advise on academic rigour and curriculum currency including on employability, research informed teaching and inclusive practice.

Our NSS results provide us with evidence of the outstanding effectiveness, value and impact of our approach. We use the optional questions on **course delivery** and on **learning community** to ensure that we capture this vital feedback from students. We have improved performance on these measures by 4% and 5% respectively over the last three years. We have very high levels of

student satisfaction on questions relating to research informed teaching (87%) and experiential learning (84%) which are well above the average for all HEIs selecting that question bank. Our scores on the learning community questions are excellent, again placing us well above the average for all institutions with responses to these 5 questions.



B11.1 I feel part of a group of students committed to learning.

B11.2 I have been able to explore academic interests with other students.

B11.3 I have learned to explore ideas confidently.

B11.4 Within my course, I feel my suggestions and ideas are valued.

B11.5 I feel part of an academic community in my college or University.

External examiners endorse the **academic rigour** of our courses. In 2016, 100% of external examiner reports confirmed academic standards, and many reports praise the stretch and challenge of courses that comes from innovative and effective assessment strategies. Student feedback also confirms that our courses provide students with the opportunity to extend themselves intellectually. The UK Engagement Survey (UKES) **course challenge** question is included in our internal Student Survey, which we ask all first and second years to complete. This shows that for the last three years we have been either above, or consistent with, the average result for all participating institutions. On course challenge, in 2016, 89% of UW students said their course had challenged them to do their best work 'quite a bit' or 'very much', compared with 87.8% for the total national survey population.

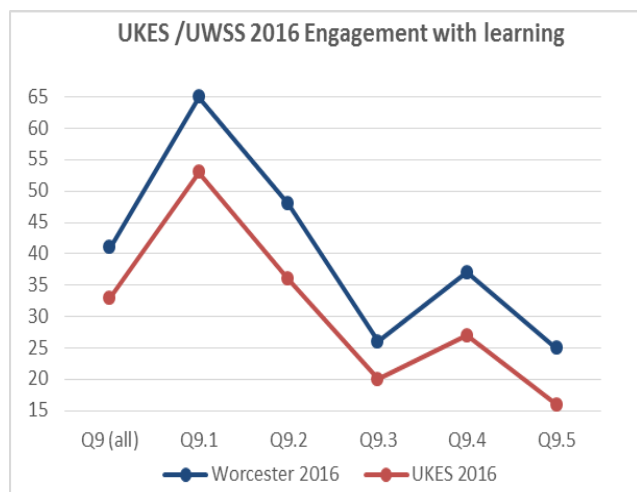
Student engagement strategies

At the heart of our extensive student engagement strategy is the student representation system. Working closely with the University, the Students' Union run and support the **student academic representatives (StARs) system**, including providing high quality training on the role of the StAR. With approximately 500 StARs each academic year, representing 1 in 20 of our students, this system has had a powerful impact on the development of courses and the quality of the learning experience at course and institutional levels. We have extended this representation system to many of our partners and our Students' Union provides training to our partners, travelling widely to do so. Over the past two years discussions through the quarterly cross-institutional StARs forums have directly contributed to ongoing improvements to timetabling, the operation of the personal academic tutor system and the availability of assistive technologies.

We also promote a model of student engagement which aims to empower students as individual learners. The model has been developed from the Primary Education course as the **Working in Partnership (WiP) project**, which launched in September 2013 and was shortlisted for a Times Higher 'Supporting Students' Award in 2015. The initiative included a modified student assessment form to help students close the feedback loop, a termly magazine produced by students for students, and a student-led course management committee. This programme continues to develop and in recent years has included a student lead role in recruitment and support for male students. In the first year of the pilot, NSS overall satisfaction with the Primary Education courses rose from 77% (2013) to 93% (2014), and has continued to achieve very high satisfaction rates. External examiners have described the model of student engagement as '*exemplary*' and '*superb*'. This approach was extended to our Psychology course in 2014, with a similarly impressive impact on NSS scores, increasing its score from 71% (2013) to 89% (2016), and attracting praise from the

British Psychological Society. The principles of these pilot projects have been widely disseminated through the University as examples of best practice. They have directly informed the development of the StARs system and the operation and focus of course management committees across academic departments, so that students are now more frequently engaged as fully participating partners in reviewing monitoring data and stakeholder feedback, in some cases chairing meetings, and being actively involved in and leading improvement initiatives (see also pp.11-12).

Data from our internal Student Survey, which incorporates the core questions from the UKES, evidences the impact of these and other approaches to student engagement and also shows how favourably we compare with the average for all institutions that take part in the UKES. As the charts below show, we perform at least 9% above the averages for all questions in relation to **engagement with learning**, when comparing the UWSS 2016 results and UKES 2016, and around 10% higher on questions related to **collaborative learning**. In the questions relating to **course work**, which generally relate to the ability to apply higher level academic skills, our students perform in line with the average for the participating institutions and 5% above the average for the question on 'evaluating or judging a point of view, decision or information source': a clear indication that we are developing critical thinking skills across the whole student cohort.



Q9. Engagement with learning (all)

Q9.1. Asked questions in taught sessions or contributed to discussions about course material in other ways

Q9.2. Discussed your academic performance and/or feedback with teaching staff

Q9.3. Talked about your career plans with teaching staff or advisors

Q9.4. Discussed ideas from your course with teaching staff outside taught sessions, including by email/online

Q9.5. Worked with teaching staff on activities other than coursework

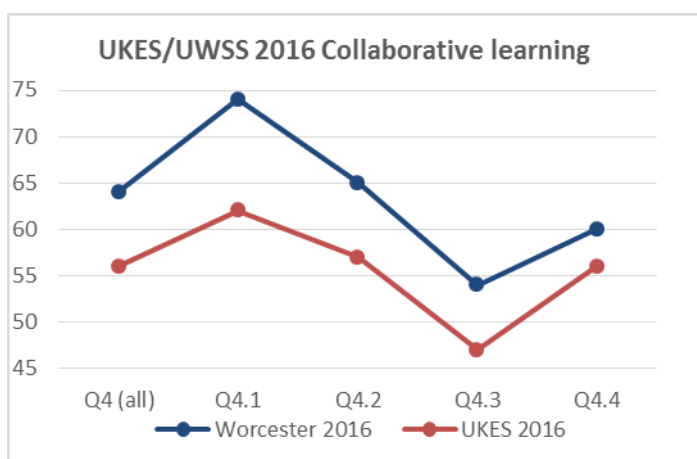
Q4. Collaborative learning (all)

Q4.1. Worked well with other students on course projects

Q4.2. Explained course material to one or more students

Q4.3. Asked another student to help you or understand course material

Q4.4. Prepared for exams or assessments by discussing or working through course material with other students



Assessment and Feedback

We have achieved demonstrable success by working in collaboration with students to ensure that their experience of assessment and feedback is developed and enhanced to support learning, and also to meet student requirements for clarity, fairness, consistency, and high quality prompt feedback. Initiatives have included the development of a **Student Feedback Charter** setting out

what students can expect from their courses in terms of assessment and feedback. This includes opportunities for formative assessment; timeliness of feedback; induction into understanding assessment criteria and practices; a requirement that feedback is provided electronically in written or audio form to assist inclusive learning; and a requirement to provide first year students with opportunities to use Turnitin® formatively in order to establish good academic practice with respect to referencing. The student record system now provides information on the turnaround time for returning feedback to students on summative assessments, so that this can be monitored by departments. Most recently we have instituted a cross-University project to ensure that there is **consistency of practice** across course teams in relation to setting of assignment briefs, use of feedback pro-forma and provision of comments on work that are focused on feeding forward [TQ4]. We use external examiner reports (as well as student feedback) to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of assessment and feedback strategies at course level. The quality of feedback provided to students is commended by external examiners across a wide range of subject areas:

- *good use...of audio tools to give excellent feedback on student work* [Computing, 2016]
- *excellent feedback sheets for student assessment... are a gold standard, which is to be admired and encouraged* [Biology, 2016]
- *excellent (often exceptional) detailed and bespoke feedback offered to students of all grades including clear reference to assessment criteria and grading schemes.* [Geography, 2016]

Students provide us with both positive and negative comments on assessment and feedback. We are not complacent, but we are pleased that the impact of what we have done shows in increasingly strong NSS scores on the assessment and feedback questions over the last three years. In the NSS 2016, the University was ranked 35 out of 155 providers in relation to satisfaction with assessment and feedback and has improved satisfaction by 6% since 2014.

Rewarding and recognising excellent teaching

Promoting and recognising teaching excellence starts with the **appointment process** for academic staff. We require all shortlisted applicants to deliver a teaching session as part of the selection process. Teaching observation, review and reflection is a key requirement of the probationary year. Newly appointed academic staff are now expected to obtain **HEA Fellowship** at the appropriate level within three years of joining the University. Those with fewer than three years' teaching experience are required to complete the PG Cert in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (PGCert LTHE). Our continuing professional development (CPD) scheme, the **Worcester Scheme**, provides support through workshops and mentoring for those who wish to be recognised for HEA Fellowship, together with an extensive **staff development and leadership development programme**. The latter incorporates workshops on a wide range of topics, 'share and inspire' seminars to disseminate excellent practice, and a **peer supported review of teaching scheme**, including teaching observation, designed to encourage the dissemination and adoption of new approaches to pedagogy. The effectiveness of this focus on CPD for staff is demonstrated in the NSS results on course delivery which show a 4% increase over the last 3 years, and against all questions in 2016 were above the national average; 84% of students confirming that 'the range and balance of approaches to teaching has helped me to learn' compared with 80% nationally.

We currently have 7 National Teaching Fellows; 31 Senior and Principal Fellows, and 278 Fellows or Associate Fellows of the HEA amongst the academic staff, and all of our academic departments have targets for increasing the number of HEA Fellows. We have a further 16 Fellows/Associate Fellows from professional support staff. We are significantly above the national average for teaching qualifications: 66% of our staff have a teaching qualification of some kind compared with 44% nationally (HEFCE CL33/2016).

For both the PGCert LTHE and the Worcester Scheme, the system of application, support and mentoring is geared towards engaging colleagues fully in their students' experience, specifically addressing the impact of professional practice with reference to the values and dimensions of the UKPSF. Training sessions and assessment for the Worcester Scheme encourage staff to reflect on

pedagogic innovation and the evaluation of the effectiveness of their practice. We build communities of practice which extend to those who mentor and assess as well as those who engage with the process of becoming recognised as HEA Fellows. Members of staff who have been awarded fellowship say that they become more confident and that the process deepens their reflective practice. There is evidence that the Worcester Scheme impacts directly upon our students' experience of teaching at Worcester. For example, one academic department, comparing module evaluations of staff who successfully applied for Fellowship and Senior Fellowship through the scheme with evaluations before their participation saw a 28.5% increase in students responding that they were very satisfied with their modules.

We recognise the vital role played by **academic course leaders** in delivering teaching excellence and ensuring student success. A course leaders' programme incorporating individual coaching and workshops designed to support the development of leaders within the University has run for the last 6 years. The programme comprises a year long, level 7 module. 49 course leaders have so far successfully completed the course. Feedback from participants in this programme prompted us in 2015/16, to begin the first phase of a two-year **Course Leaders' project**, which asked all course leaders what support they needed to excel in their role. This year, we are implementing recommendations around personal development, reward and recognition, and resources to support them in key aspects of their role.

For over a decade, we have had a number of well established teaching excellence award schemes, including the **University Teaching Awards scheme**. This focuses on excellence and innovation and is intended to act as a stepping stone towards developing an application for Senior Fellowship of the HEA or developing an application for promotion. 10 awards were made in 2016, and the winners will publish case studies on the University Learning and Teaching blog to share their excellent practice. Since 2014, the Students' Union has held **the Student Led Teaching Awards** as a means for students to recognise staff for excellent teaching, inspiration and commitment. The numbers of nominations from students have risen each year to just under 500 in 2016. Students presented conclusions drawn from the 2016 nominations process at the University's annual Learning and Teaching Conference to support the sharing of best practice. We also hold an annual Mentoring Award ceremony, which recognises the contribution of mentors from professional organisations to the experiential learning of our students.

The University has a well established **Reward and Recognition Scheme** which incorporates annual opportunities to apply for promotion or additional salary increments. We also invite applications for promotion to professor on an annual basis. For both of these schemes, the criteria explicitly reflect a commitment to teaching as well as to research, and to academic leadership. We also support staff in publishing and in presenting on teaching and learning at external conferences both by funding and through writing retreats.

All of our schemes for recognising and rewarding excellence in teaching take account of evidence from module evaluations, which are key mechanisms for improving the student experience. The **module evaluation process** is centrally managed and overseen. We provide all departments with summary reports on module satisfaction. In 2016, the proportion of modules with 90%+ satisfaction was 79.6%, a welcome indication that the measures that we have in place to encourage, support and reward excellent teaching have produced tangible benefits for our students.

B. Learning Environment

Our strengths in this respect are:

- Sector leading and innovative approaches to the development of outstanding and truly inclusive learning resources, which have won a variety of national awards [LE1, SO3]
- Research informed approaches to course design and teaching that ensure from the outset students are consistently and frequently engaged with research, scholarship and professional

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applied and practice based learning. 87% of students agreed in the 2016 NSS that their learning has benefitted from modules informed by current research, compared to a top quartile score of 81% [LE2, TQ1]

- Sector leading innovative range of opportunities to allow students to work as co-researchers and collaborators through paid assistantships and 'live' projects [LE2, TQ1]
- Outstanding access to and use of digital resources, demonstrated by SCONUL statistics and NSS results in the top quartile, indicating student satisfaction of 92% [LE1]
- Inclusive and personalised learning support, evidenced by student feedback and attainment and international recognition of our approach to inclusive education [LE3].

The University commitment to inclusion and student engagement is exemplified through its strategic and inclusive approach to the development of learning resources, including physical, library and digital resources to support the development of every learner. Satisfaction with learning resources measured by the NSS and the internal Student Survey has risen rapidly over the last three years compared with the sector, where figures have been largely static.

The Hive, Europe's only university and public library, is both a powerful statement of belief in learning and inclusion and a highly successful, innovative exemplar of inclusive learning in practice. Despite being situated in the small city of Worcester, it is the second most visited public library in Britain, and since opening five years ago, book borrowing by teenagers has increased by 356%. It has been shortlisted for or won more than 30 awards, including winning The *Guardian* University Award for Best Contribution to the Local Community 2013, and it won the award for the best large national university and college library in the 2016 SCONUL (Society of College, National and University Libraries) Library Design Awards. It is the base for the County's Archives, which gives students access to specialist documents and artefact conservation facilities to assist them in their research. The Children's Library, which is one of the largest in the UK, creates opportunities for our trainee teachers to study alongside children, families and local schools. In 2015/16, our Times Higher Education award winning library team ran 222 large group sessions to support students using library resources and tools, reaching over 6,500 students, together with 180 small group and individual sessions.

We have a sector leading inclusive facility in the **University of Worcester Arena**, which opened in 2013. This is the first indoor sports arena and teaching resource in the UK which has been purpose-designed and built to include the wheelchair student and athlete. In 2015 it won the *Guardian* award for *Buildings That Inspire* and in 2016 it was the subject of a House of Commons debate, drawing praise from the Minister for Disabled People. The Arena has cemented the University's reputation for being a leader in inclusive education. It hosts national and international sporting events, as well as being a regular venue for local schools and community clubs. This provides diverse and rich opportunities for students on a wide range of courses to engage in practical and applied learning, as well as offering part-time employment and volunteering activities. Worcester is now the UK's most successful educator of degree-qualified Physical Education teachers, sports coaches and sports psychologists with expertise in inclusive sport. Our international reputation for inclusive education was recently acknowledged by invitations extended to our Vice Chancellor, to discuss our ground-breaking work, both at the International Paralympic Committee Summit in Rio, and with the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Committee.

Digital resources

We have a clear strategy for developing technology enhanced learning to impact on the digital capabilities of both students and staff. Investment in ICT infrastructure, digital technologies and electronic resources as well as an effective student engagement strategy ensure that resources are actively and consistently used by students to enhance learning. 91% of students in the 2016 internal Student Survey agreed that their course makes good use of learning technologies.

In 2014, we established '**baseline**' standards in the use of the **VLE** across all modules. A sample survey of modules in 2016 showed 94% of modules were at least meeting the baseline

standards and many were considerably exceeding it. The 2015 Jisc Student Digital Experience Tracker survey, in which we participated, showed that Worcester students could more frequently access e-resources and online course materials than is the case for the sector on average. The survey also indicated UW students were engaging on a par with the sector average in finding information online; working online with others; producing work in digital format and creating a personal record of their learning, and that they are more satisfied with the support they receive.

In 2015 a project to make **core reading resources** more available and accessible resulted in 100% of modules having a reading list uploaded to a central system and linked to the VLE with e-content available at a click. The NSS score for the library rose by 3% that academic year. A commitment to give students choice in which books were bought by the library has resulted in over 1500 additional e-books being acquired. SCONUL annual statistics show that e-book accesses in 2014/15 at Worcester were 229 per FTE student: 65% higher than our benchmarked institutions and 110% higher than the figure for all new universities; e-journal article downloads 2014/15 were 83.6 per FTE student: 18% higher than our benchmarked institutions and 16% higher than all new universities. Print item loans were 44.3 per FTE student which is more than 3 times the level for both benchmarked and new universities. In the 2016 NSS, 92% of our students expressed satisfaction with access to IT facilities, compared with 91% for the top quartile.

In this academic year, we have piloted the '**Reach**' scheme, whereby first year students are provided with a tablet pre-loaded with course core texts and other learning materials. The intention is to support student engagement through the development of interactive technology-enhanced learning strategies and online learning communities. The initial pilot of 350 students across three courses is receiving excellent feedback and having a very positive impact on teaching and learning. As a result, we will extend the scheme to three more large academic cohorts for 2017/18.

Developing Research Skills: Linking Teaching and Research

Our Learning and Teaching Strategy commits us to induct all students into research-informed academic communities of the University, both by engaging with the academic research and scholarship of others, understanding research processes, methods, ethics and engaging in their own research, usually through a final year independent research project. We also ensure that courses at level 6 consistently demonstrate alignment with the FHEQ by engaging our students with current, relevant research in their discipline. Students recognise and value our approach, with an outstanding NSS score of 87% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement 'my learning has benefitted from modules that are informed by current research' compared with a top quartile score of 81%.

We review **research/teaching links** across the University, to identify good practice to share. Most recently we did this by surveying the course leaders and University's professors using the well established Healey and Jenkins (2009) model and using their definitions of research led, research oriented, research tutored and research based teaching. The audit showed us that we consistently engage students with each of these forms of research engaged teaching, demonstrating the enthusiasm of academic staff to engage and involve undergraduate students in their work. In addition, 90% of course leaders indicated that their course incorporates a compulsory independent study or enquiry based individual research project at level 6, underpinned by a level 5 module dedicated to students learning research processes and methods. 49% indicated that they provided opportunities within the course curriculum for students to work with staff as co-researchers on discipline based projects, and 82% indicated that there were opportunities outside of the curriculum for students to engage in research activity with course staff. 73% said that they provide opportunities within the course curriculum for students to undertake research or enquiry based projects in association with employers or other external agencies. Examples of curriculum related projects include:

- Archaeology students participate in a "live" excavation research project designed to provide answers to nationally identified research questions

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- English students are engaged in e-editing early modern manuscripts or texts
- Experimental Animation students conduct action based research working with external organisations to raise awareness of social issues
- Creative Writing students work with the National Trust on a range of projects to better engage the public with the historical stories associated with local Trust properties
- History students have worked with two Heritage Lottery funded community groups and a community historian to publish a book with History Press.

Students as Co-Researchers

We also provide undergraduate students with the opportunity to undertake paid work as research assistants over the summer vacation. The **Vacation Research Assistantship** scheme provides our undergraduates and recent graduates with 'hands on' experience of working on a research project, enabling them to gain insight into a research career, as well as enhancing their CV. The scheme has run for 5 years, growing steadily. In 2016 there were 49 applications for 22 Vacation Research Assistantships (VRAs). Some examples of the VRAs funded are:

- A student worked with our Mood Disorders Research Group to explore the impact of a storyline on postpartum psychosis featured on BBC's *EastEnders* (2016)
- A student was employed on an ongoing project in physical geography working with cutting-edge technology (Unmanned Aerial Systems), to assess river morphology and potential causes of floods and of riverine habitat destruction (2015)
- A student worked with our Biomedical Research Group on a pilot project investigating the link between a tumour suppressor protein and Leukaemia (2014).

An evaluation of the scheme undertaken in 2016 showed that a significant number of students who had undertaken a VRA had gone on to either Masters by Research or PhD programmes and that a number had gone on to take up employment opportunities in a specific research role; for example, as a researcher for the Environment Agency.

Students as Co-Creators and Academic Partners

In 2016, we piloted 8 **Vacation Teaching Development Assistantship** (VTDA) projects, modelled on the VRA, providing students or recent graduates with experience of collaborating on an educational development project over the summer vacation. The focus of the projects was the development of e-learning materials. We provided project planning and 'technology enhanced learning' curriculum design workshops and support for the students. All projects produced outputs that have had a significant impact on courses and on the learning and skills development of the students involved. Staff said that the projects exceeded expectations in terms of what was achieved by students, and resulted in the development of student portals and online tool kits to support specialist skills development, as well as new and redeveloped learning materials to support flipped learning via Blackboard including quizzes, workbooks, journals, video presentations and reading materials, together with guides to accessing materials.

The **Students as Academic Partners (SAP) scheme** offers students the opportunity to work in equal partnership with academic staff to develop the student learning experience, by integrating students into the teaching and learning communities of academic departments and cultivating a sense of ownership and engagement in course development. Students are paid for their time in working on the project and their findings are presented at the annual University Learning and Teaching Conference. We provide workshops to support the writing of applications, project planning and writing conference abstracts and presentations to support students in this process. The scheme is now in its 5th year. In 2015/16, the SAP scheme supported 20 projects involving 56 students. Projects have been used to facilitate outreach and public engagement, transform admissions selection processes and induction programmes, map digital experiences, evaluate student perceptions of various forms of assessment, as well as developing new initiatives in

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employability and producing reusable learning materials. Successful projects in 2015/16 which produced high pedagogic impact or sustainable outcomes included:

- Student Script Editors: 2nd and 3rd year students acting as critical peer mentors for 1st year students in Screenwriting (now embedded in the course curriculum)
- Early Modern Studies: a journal of student research; development of an online interdisciplinary journal (now launched as a sustainable journal)
- Strengthening Resilience: development and use of a behaviour management toolkit (course material) for initial teacher training courses.

Engaging students on this range of projects has fostered a partnership culture which encourages and celebrates the scholarship of learning and teaching and of pedagogic and discipline based research. It also directly impacts on the learning and employability of students. A number of projects have been published in the annual peer-reviewed Worcester Journal of Learning and Teaching and students co-present at University and external Learning and Teaching Conferences.

Personalised learning

Our teaching 'excellence tree' exercise (see p.3) clearly showed the value that students place on personalised learning support and staff/student relationships and interaction, and indicated that students felt this to be a particular strength at Worcester. One key mechanism for personalising learning which is embedded across all courses is the **personal academic tutoring (PAT) system**. In 2013, we implemented a revised PAT system and developed the student record system to enable personal academic tutors to access assignment feedback for all modules taken by their personal tutees. Academic staff can therefore build a truly holistic picture of their students, and can identify trends in feedback across different modules to provide targeted support. Every academic department provides the same support for students through the PAT system, but each course tailors it to support the course curriculum. In 2015/16 we reviewed the impact and effectiveness of different departmental approaches to PAT through a research project, aiming to identify best practice. We are supporting the roll-out of key principles across the University, so that impact on both student engagement and achievement is maximised. In 2016 we worked closely with the Students' Union in a **campaign to encourage student engagement with the PAT system**. The campaign sought to gather information on whether students knew who their PAT was, if they had met them, and what they would like their PAT to help them with. 747 responses were received and the collated results were reported to the University with recommendations on follow-up actions. A pleasing 93.4% of students knew who their PAT was; of those who were unsure, the Students' Union sent out personalised emails which included information about their PAT.

Personalised learning and support is also central to the University's approach to inclusion, particularly for disabled students. We provide a comprehensive disability and dyslexia support service offering advice and support ranging from dyslexia testing and use of assistive technology to one to one study support and note takers. We have a range of resources in place to support both students and staff in ensuring awareness of, and practical support for, issues around inclusion. These include a University created web-based resource that provides advice on Strategies for Creating Inclusive Programmes of Study (SCIPS). SCIPS is widely cited by other HE providers and was translated into four European languages as part of an EU funded project. At Worcester, it is embedded within the student record system for easy access. In addition there is guidance for ensuring accessible placement experiences and toolkits for students and staff in developing inclusive practice and making reasonable adjustments. We are also a sector leader in supporting students with mental health difficulties; we were one of the first universities to establish specialist mental health counselling, and we now have a unique successful multi-agency Suicide Safer initiative, with two PhD studentships. As part of this initiative, the University worked with the Students' Union to launch a dedicated Nightline listening service and rolled out specialist training for staff.

The 2016 NSS data shows that students with a specific learning disability are just as satisfied with their experience overall as students with no disability. Indeed, those with a disability other than a specific learning disability are 5% more satisfied than those with no disability. Our retention data shows that there is no gap between young disabled and non-disabled students and only a slightly greater tendency for mature students with disabilities to withdraw. All of these statistics evidence the genuine success of the measures that we have put in place to support inclusion at every stage of the students' academic journey (see also p.15)

C. Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

Our strengths in this respect are:

- Outstanding employment outcomes for our students: the 2014/15 DLHE survey showed Worcester graduates achieving their best ever levels of progression to employment or further study (95.8%), placing us joint 17th of English HEIs (excluding specialist medical, drama and art institutions) [SO1]
- Consistently low unemployment rates: our students' unemployment rates have been well below the national average for the last 5 years, and dropped to a record low of just 2.5% for 2014/15 leavers compared with 5% nationally [SO1]
- Outstanding learning gain in terms of confidence, tackling unfamiliar problems and communications skills as evidenced by consistent top quartile NSS results relating to personal development [SO2, SO3]
- Consistently strong retention and achievement outcomes for all students regardless of social group [SO3].

Employment outcomes for our students are already very strong and continually improving. This relates to our focused approach to **embedding employability** across the curriculum, our **links with employers** at local, regional and national levels, and the wide range of opportunities that we provide to students to enhance their employability skills. Our last QAA review identified this as a feature of good practice, and we have continued to expand these opportunities significantly. There are generally good employment outcomes for disadvantaged groups. Our split TEF metrics do show negative flags for full-time mature and female students in terms of highly skilled employment and for disabled students in terms of entering employment or further study. However, detailed analysis indicates this is strongly related to local labour market factors, discussed below. Commentary on the positive flags related to part-time provision has already been provided on p.2.

The University's achievements in this area should be viewed against a challenging local background. A high proportion of UW graduates remain in the region, with 70% working in the West Midlands and 22% working in Worcestershire. Unlike the rest of England, Worcestershire has seen a 4.3% decrease in the percentage of management roles and a decrease in professional roles by 1.1%. The region is predominantly rural, as is its neighbour, Herefordshire, and this provides specific challenges for our graduates who seek employment in the area. Worcestershire has lower average salaries than the rest of the wider West Midlands region and significantly lower than the national average, according to research carried out by the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership. Businesses in the region are mostly SMEs, which has led us to developing a comprehensive educational and extra-curricular offering in entrepreneurship to support students who aspire to self-employment. In addition, around 70% of Worcester graduates enter the health and education sectors; this includes nurses, teachers, midwives and paramedics, and those working in areas such as early years, youth and community work, family support, social care and social welfare. The past 3 years have also seen a decrease in the region of more than 3,000 roles in health and social work activities, with a drop from 14.4% to 12.6% of the working population. Changes to the provision and delivery of public services have reduced opportunities in these areas and as a result graduates, particularly female and mature student graduates, have experienced problems in obtaining higher level work.

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There is a specific and important sector wide issue around the standard occupational classification (SOC) coding of jobs typical of the early years, learning support, health and social care, and working with children and families sectors. Even though the government has expressed intentions of increasing the number of graduates in these sectors, many of these roles are not classified as 'professional' or 'managerial' occupations, and thus are not categorised as 'highly skilled' or 'graduate' occupations in the DLHE Statistics. This is particularly relevant for the high proportions of female and mature graduates of our related Foundation degrees and BA/BSc courses. These are work-based courses providing those already working within these sectors with opportunities for professional development. Often graduation does not immediately result in a change of employment, and unless graduates from these programmes are already in (or enter) managerial posts they are not counted as in highly skilled employment. It is well documented that students with disabilities experience more difficulties in finding work or progressing to further study. Our Careers and Employability Service has produced resources to signpost students with disabilities to appropriate sources of support. It works closely with local and national organisations to address support for disabled graduates. Worcester students with disabilities have been offered free places on national employability programmes such as Frontrunner and Common Purpose.

Employability and careers support for students

Our innovative **Earn as You Learn** programme promotes part-time job opportunities both within the University and in the local community. In 2015/16 it involved 740 students in 50 different roles across the University. This includes the Media Lab, a Business School initiative which provides opportunities for students of all disciplines to engage in paid work on 'live' client projects requiring information technology, media and wider business and computing skills. In addition, the Students' Union facilitates a **volunteering** programme with over 60 local organisations. In 2015/16, students gave around 30,000 hours of their time to volunteering activities. Students tell us that volunteering increases their confidence and inspires them to help those less fortunate than themselves. It also provides them with opportunities to develop business awareness, technical and soft skills including team work. The Careers and Employability Service offers an advice and guidance service to all graduates for up to three years after graduating. This begins with a LinkedIn photo-booth at graduation ceremonies, and includes 'Step Up', an intensive programme for recent graduates to develop their employability skills. Student feedback has been extremely positive and our employment statistics indicate the real success of our approach.

A proactive approach to employability is embedded throughout our course curricula, with defined transferable skills and employment related learning outcomes. All of our courses offer some form of **work-related experience** through a placement or work project based modules. We work closely with employer representatives to develop the partnerships that support the development and take up of these opportunities. For example, the Business School has an agreed set of employability skills developed with their Employers' Advisory group and which are explicitly mapped for each module. **Live projects** working with local employers are a feature of many arts, media, and business and computing courses. The impact of employability related curricular and extra-curricular developments is reflected in the 2016 NSS score of 88% for 'As a result of my course, I believe that I have improved my career prospects'.

All students are encouraged to participate in the **Worcester Award**, which is structured to support personal development. In order to participate, students must record extra-curricular activities and reflect upon how these activities can help to improve future employability. Achievement of the Award is recorded on students' Higher Education Achievement Report and a certificate of achievement. Feedback is entirely positive with 100% of the 248 students who completed the award in 2015 saying they would recommend it, and especially the way in which it *'makes you believe in yourself a little more'*. Analysis of DLHE data shows that Worcester Award achievers are more likely to have high ambitions and to be focused on further personal and career development.

The opportunities to develop enterprise and entrepreneurship are popular at the University with 82 students currently taking elective modules in social and business enterprise. Extra-curricular

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activities include **Momentum**, a support package for students launching a new start-up or growing recently launched businesses, including office space and meeting rooms on flexible terms; **Worcesterpreneur** networking events attended by an average of 50 students; and weekly business idea clinics run by one of the **12 University Entrepreneurs in Residence (EiRs)**. The innovative EiRs scheme was very influential in the Business School gaining Institute of Enterprise and Entrepreneurs (IOEE) Centre of Excellence status in July 2016, making it one of only a handful of UK HEIs to hold such status in the training and development of Enterprise Educators. We also work very closely with the Worcestershire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP): our Vice Chancellor is a full Board member and senior colleagues sit on the two major sub-committees. The success of our approach to encouraging students to develop their business ideas is reflected in our employability statistics. Individual students also shine: one of our 2015/16 graduates was named as the Midlands Entrepreneur of the Year, and her company named as Midlands Exporter of the Year. She says that Worcester taught her to '*approach the world with an open mind*'.

Positive outcomes for all

We attract significant numbers of students from low participation neighbourhoods (33% from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2); those who are first generation in HE (53%) and disabled students (11%). Our track record of widening participation is excellent, and we see in the success of our students real evidence of the transformative effect of our personalised and inclusive approach to teaching, student support and the development of the individual.

In 2016 the University awarded **67% of 1 and 2:1 degrees** against 73% nationally. However, such comparisons do not take account of benchmarking factors such as entry qualifications, student characteristics, subject of study and social disadvantage, so they are less helpful than a comparison with sister HEIs with a similar student profile. When compared to those institutions, our proportion of 1 and 2:1 degrees is very similar, the range being 55% to 73%. For some years, our aim has been to achieve more consistent outcomes in degree attainment across our six academic departments. We have achieved that goal, and we are now refining our efforts to address attainment gaps between different social groups, and those with different entry qualifications.

Despite the challenges that a committed widening participation mission can bring, our strategies have steadily reduced student withdrawals over the last five years so that we now perform well against our HESA benchmark and the national average for retention. Our projected outcomes performance indicator for full-time students starting first degree courses is 83%, above our benchmark of 81%. Data for non-continuation shows that we are performing slightly above benchmarks for retention across all student groups. However, we are aware that mature students (and particularly mature male students and mature disabled students), BAME students, and those entering with BTEC entry qualifications, are more vulnerable to withdrawal. This is consistent with the national picture. We have a **Student Performance Monitoring Group** which tracks the performance of different groups and identifies appropriate actions. Recent action has focused on raising staff awareness of the issues faced by disabled and BAME students; support and building resilience for male students in primary education and work to better assure induction and successful progression for students entering with Access and BTEC qualifications. It is too early to properly assess the impact of this work, but we aim to ensure attainment gaps, where they exist, are systematically narrowed. We are particularly proud of the achievements of our disabled students who in 2015 achieved a higher proportion of first and second class degrees (67%) than those who have no disability (61%).

Our **NSS results for personal development** are consistently outstanding and in the top quartile. With the exception of male students, who show slightly lower levels of satisfaction, there are no significant differences between social groups. This demonstrates real learning gain in the development of students' self-confidence, communication skills, and ability to tackle unfamiliar problems. The results evidence the success of our strategies for inclusion, engagement and personalised learning in particular. They also reflect the emphasis we place as a University on the development of the whole student as a basis for lifelong learning and success.