1. MISSION AND CONTEXT

The University of Plymouth is committed through its institutional strategy, *Advancing Knowledge, Transforming Lives 2016-2020*, to a detailed and measurable definition of teaching excellence:

We deliver high-quality research-led and professionally relevant teaching. A stimulating student experience ensures challenge, personal development, and employment success. Our graduates are highly capable, confident and adaptable global citizens. Succeeding in their ambitions, and leaders of the future, they make a difference in society.

Our Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Strategy, 2013-2020 (hereafter TLSE) aims *"to provide an excellent learning and stimulating student experience, where students are at the heart of all our considerations"*. This strategy has focused our activities into three areas: (1) supporting our students as partners on their journey of discovery, (2) educating them based on the latest pedagogical research and professionally-informed practice, and (3) supporting their development so they succeed in their ambitions.

The core ethos of the University is to champion the availability of HE regionally, nationally and internationally via our global network of transnational education (TNE) partnerships, across the broad range of disciplines. As a regional university, we draw the majority of our students from the South West, an area characterised by an adult population that has below average participation in HE. Our location allows students to access specialisms in marine disciplines, a vibrant cultural and tourism sector, fieldwork opportunities and a thriving entrepreneurial culture. However, the South West job market is challenging, with few large employers. Of employers, 89.2% are micro businesses (fewer than ten employees) and only 1.4% of businesses have between 50 and 249 employees (Nomis Labour Market Profile data). Our focus on employability, enterprise and sustainability skills is therefore crucial.

Our strong presence in the South West supports widening participation, raises aspiration and ensures significant involvement in our communities. We improve the opportunities for students in regional 'cold spots' via our extensive and longstanding (nearly 40 years in some cases) regional partner college network, while we support the aspiration of partners to obtain their own degree awarding powers. Partnership activity is run and supported by a consolidated Academic Partnerships division which combines regional, national and international TNE partnerships, and also has responsibility for our higher-level apprenticeships. Our partners have senior representatives on strategic University committees, including Senate, to ensure they have a voice in strategic policy and portfolio developments.

We support 21,073 taught students (HESA 2016-17), and a further 15,500 students through our regional network and international partner institutions. Our excellence in supporting our partners is demonstrated by our recognition as a Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) for Higher Education Learning Partnerships, one of four CETLs we were awarded (2005-10) and of our eight South West regional partners, four were awarded Gold and four Silver in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2017.

Our commitment to regional communities goes beyond education and in 2012 we were awarded the Social Enterprise Mark. We were the first university to achieve this award in recognition of working as a social enterprise, caring for communities and protecting the planet. In 2015, our dental social enterprise won the Social and Community Impact category of the *Guardian* University Awards, and is recognised as transforming the UK's dental education by pioneering community-based teaching. Last year 268 students conducted 78,630 clinical procedures. We are now replicating this model with medical and optometry students.

This success is built on a foundation of institution-wide academic quality, innovative pedagogy and partnering with our students. Our focus on research-led teaching includes a particular emphasis on practical 'real world' experiential learning. Our commitment to excellence is evident in 23 National Teaching Fellowships awarded since 2000, and 13 Principal Fellows and 81 Senior Fellows of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). Of University staff, 77% possess a recognised teaching qualification, putting us in 15th position nationally (HESA 2017). In 2017, we were shortlisted by the HEA for the Global Teaching Excellence Award. We were the first post-1992 university to have our own medical and dental school, and the only post-92 university to offer undergraduate medicine and dentistry. Driven by core principles of exceptional clinical learning, strong social engagement and world-class research, our medical students have patient experiences from the first weeks of the course and dental students begin patient treatment in the latter part of the first year. These courses have been commended for several areas of best practice by the General Medical and General Dental Councils and consistently score above the NSS discipline mean. Our medicine graduates have retained a UK top five ranking within the GMC's F1 Preparedness for Practice National Training Survey between 2012 and 2017.

Students' Union statement on preparation of the TEF submission
The University of Plymouth Students' Union (UPSU) has worked with the University to produce this submission. Maja Smith, VP Education, and Sarah Davey, Deputy CEO, were members of the group that prepared this submission, working in a meaningful partnership with the University.

2. COMMENTARY ON THE METRICS

2.1 Majority Mode: Full-Time Undergraduates

The core metrics for our majority mode of study (full time) reflect: (1) the quality of our teaching, (2) the supportiveness of our learning environment, and (3) the impact of our sustained work over the past five years to enhance the employability of our students.

We are above benchmark for four of the six core metrics: (1) 'teaching', (2) 'assessment and feedback', (3) 'academic support', and (4) 'continuation'. The splits for these metrics underline our support for the full range of our students, with 96% (75/78) of the split indicators above benchmark. We are particularly proud of our inclusive approach to mature and BME students, evident in + and ++ flags for teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support. We recognise we are below benchmark for the two Student Outcomes core metrics, (with a -- flag for 'highly skilled employment or further study'). But overall, for all six metrics, 67% of our split indicators are above benchmark (75/112).

We face some challenges from geographical location, our commitments to widening participation and our anchor institution responsibilities. The majority of our students (62%) are from the South West and a larger majority (66%) remain here after graduation (HESA 2013/14-2015/16). This is significant because the Plymouth economy, bordering Devon and Cornwall, is characterised by low levels of professional jobs (39% compared to a national average of 46%), low average wages (8% below the national average), and a preponderance of SMEs (Nomis data). The TEF benchmarking methodology does not currently take such local economic circumstances into account.

Five years ago, we recognised the impact of these regional factors by making student development and employability one of four goals in our TLSE strategy. As a practical symbol of this focus, our Careers & Employability Service was relocated into much improved physical space in the flagship Roland Levinsky Building, to raise both accessibility and profile. We initiated a programme of activity to help our students adapt to the world of work and find highly skilled employment more quickly. Data suggest that while our provision equipped them to

succeed in the medium to long term (since corroborated by LEO data, see 2.3 below), local economic circumstances posed significant challenges for our students in the short term.

Our core metrics show that over this three-year TEF period our 'employment or further study' indicator improved from 91.8% to 92.9% (+1.1%) and 'highly skilled employment or further study' indicator from 62.1% to 70.6% (+8.5%). Our most recent indicator (70.6% in year 3) brings us within 1.3% of the core benchmark, demonstrating the significant progress we have made over the period. We have used HESA data to examine the trend in our split indicators for these two metrics and they show a corresponding trajectory, with 93% (26/28) improving over the three-year period.

2.2 Minority Mode: Part-Time Undergraduates

We have examined the core metrics for our minority mode of study (part-time) in some detail. Our courses are overwhelmingly full-time: part-time students represent a very small proportion of our undergraduates with a 9% headcount and less than 4% FTE. Students who study part-time generally do so with our partners within Academic Partnerships. Our 'conventional' part-time undergraduate population is actually even smaller, for two reasons, both of which significantly skew the data.

(a) Repeating students: 38% of the students reported as part-time are repeating full-time students classified as part-time due to the way University regulations historically managed credit retrieval and progression. This anomaly is being rectified from 2018/19 following consultation across the institution including with UPSU. This is significant for our two DLHE metrics. With 53% of our 490 part-time DLHE population being repeating full-time students (285 students), the impact of transferring these students to our majority mode is negligible (2.7% of our full-time DLHE population, and an even smaller proportion of our full-time NSS population). However, the impact on our 'genuine' part-time population is significant: 'employment or further study' improves from 88.6% to 90.5% (+1.9%), and 'highly skilled employment or further study' improves from 63.9% to 76.7% (+12.8%). This is significantly above the current benchmark of 72.7% and would result in at least a + flag.

(b) CPD requirements: 72% of our 415 part-time continuing students population are registered on the BSc (Hons) Health Studies and counted erroneously in our non-continuation statistics. This degree is designed to fulfil the CPD needs of working healthcare professionals who complete one module at a time, engaging with the course over several years. This flexibility is a necessity for healthcare professions to manage their professional development, and has affected a number of other institutions. After agreement with HEFCE, we have recoded this programme to accurately reflect the situation, effectively removing this cohort from the future continuation population. Modelling the impact of this reveals that continuation improves from 41.4% to 80.3% (+38.9%). This is significantly above the benchmark of 72.5% and would have resulted in a ++ flag. The previous inappropriate registration of students on a course that is significant for the continuing education of the healthcare workforce in the South West should not be interpreted, therefore, as a failure to support these students.

In summary, our conventional part-time FTE population is less than 2% of our undergraduate population and the actions we have taken to resolve the data issues as outlined above, if retrospectively applied, would remove our four ! indicators and convert at least two of our five - and -- flags for our core metrics to + or ++ flags (based on current benchmarks; Table 1) with corresponding improvement in our split indicators. Nonetheless, we are committed to improving the outcomes of all students and despite the data issues we will continue to ensure improvement for this cohort.

2.3 Supplementary Metrics

The supplementary metrics for our majority mode of study (full-time) demonstrate that our institutional policies and practices enable our students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to achieve successful outcomes in the medium to long term. Despite our regional challenges, we are close to benchmark for both core metrics: 'sustained employment or further study' (-0.3%) and 'above median earnings threshold or further study' (-0.8%). The splits for these metrics underline our support for the full range of our students, with all but four of the split metrics close to benchmark (of the remaining four, two are flagged - and two are flagged +). We are proud that our work with students from low participation areas, a key aspect of our commitment to widening participation, has enabled our POLAR Q1 or Q2 students (29% of our student population) to achieve above benchmark for 'above median earnings threshold or further study'.

Table 1 – Modelled impact of removing (a) BSc (Hons) Health Studies students from the continuation population, and (b) repeating part-time students from the DLHE population.

	Current indicator (%)	Modelled indicator (%)	Current Benchmark	Current Flag	Estimated Flag
Continuation	41.4%	80.3%	72.5	--	++
Employment or further study	88.6%	90.5%	95.4	--	-
Highly skilled employment or further study	63.9%	76.7%	72.7	--	+

The supplementary metrics for our minority mode of study (part-time) have required careful interpretation. We are close to benchmark for 'sustained employment or further study' (-0.5%) but -- flagged for 'above median earnings threshold or further study' (-6.2%). The populations are small, representing 11% of our total LEO population. For 'above median earnings threshold or further study', our own students contribute almost 10% to the core benchmark and up to 43% for the splits; many of the benchmarks are of limited use. Nevertheless, while we believe this below-benchmark result to be closely linked to the low average wages locally, this is an area where we anticipate further enhancement over the medium term resulting from the recent changes to our Plymouth Compass graduate attributes framework (Section 5.2) and enhancements to the Careers & Employability Service (Section 5.1).

Our good honours metrics demonstrate a measured and sustained approach to improving student attainment over the ten-year period. First class honours have increased by 12% (less than the sector median) whilst our 2:1 degree awards have remained the same (less than the sector median). This confirms we have robust procedures to prevent inappropriate grade inflation. External examiners consistently note the reliability of our assessment processes.

3. TEACHING QUALITY

We are above benchmark for 'teaching and assessment' and 'feedback' core metrics for full-time students. We are very close to the boundary for a positive flag for 'assessment and feedback' with a Z-score of 3.3 standard deviations and an indicator value of 1.5% above benchmark. For the corresponding split metrics, we score above benchmark for 95% (38/40) of the split indicators, with six positive flags.

3.1 Student Engagement

We have a strong track record of student engagement driven by a stimulating curriculum that focuses on real-world knowledge and experiential learning, the institutional roll-out of peer-

assisted learning with our students, and fostering a partnership with our students that encourages feedback for programme enhancement and development. Across our disciplines, teaching is conducted by researchers who are shaping their academic field, visible to students through publications, textbooks, and their involvement with academic and external professional bodies. Staff have a strong commitment to involving undergraduates as co-researchers in their work through dissertations and projects.

As part of the TLSE Strategy, we implemented our institutional Curriculum Enhancement Project (CEP) in 2014/15 as a framework for enriching the University-wide student engagement and experience through immersive learning, early assessment and feedback, an emphasis on group study and extended academic induction. The introduction of first-year immersive modules led to increases in student attainment (from 62% to 66% on average), narrowed the attainment gap for specific groups (particularly male students and disabled students), and reduced student withdrawals on 'early adopter' programmes to less than 50%.

Experiential learning is a founding principle of the University. A key pillar in the CEP and the 'immersive' induction module, experiential learning has enabled staff to try out new active learning approaches including live project work to expose students to commercial realities with our industrial partners, and rapid prototyping using our software and fabrication and testing resources. These tasks challenge students in their first semester to go beyond their previous educational experiences, and start to develop key employability behaviours and skills. Although in its infancy, the CEP project is already making an impact on students' outcomes and we are continually improving in response to feedback.

The Peer-Assisted Learning Scheme (PALS) has become embedded in 30 subject areas involving over 400 students as leaders since 2011. These, mostly second year, students lead sessions for first-year students to clarify and enhance learning in a small friendly and relaxed group atmosphere. PALS leaders receive training and regular support and provide feedback to teaching teams to allow for wider scale interventions in real time during a module. In 2016-17, PALS involvement in academic programmes afforded 3,292 students the opportunity to attend scheduled study sessions led by more-experienced students on their programmes.

Our student body are our partners. The TLSE Strategy states that the University will "*strive to ensure our students are included and equipped to participate in all University decision-making bodies in meaningful ways*". Thus, the student voice is heard and valued in decision-making, especially feeding into the curriculum and student experience. Our 'Students as Partners' agreement (2010) outlines how the University and students work together to enhance academic standards and the student experience. It resulted in an HEA Change Academy Project (2011) devoted to finding ways of making its ethos a reality across the institution (it saw the introduction of school-level reps and the enshrining of the principle that students should sit on academic interview panels wherever possible). In order to guarantee the student voice is heard at the highest level, we ensure that Sabbatical Officers are represented on the Board of Governors, Senate and all appropriate institutional-level committees. Student academic representatives are members of appropriate faculty and school committees. Student-staff liaison groups exist for all taught programmes, often chaired by students, and membership of Programme Committees allows course representatives to provide feedback on behalf of their peers and to scrutinise external examiners' reports.

The Student Life Committee is co-chaired by the UPSU President and the DVC (Education and Experience) to ensure meaningful engagement with students and to report on all aspects of student life at the University. Charged with developing, monitoring and implementing the 'Students as Partners' strategy it consults with students, initiates action, promotes best practice and enhancement, and provides opportunities for policy development and review by the student body and others. As appropriate, it refers matters to other committees. Students

have significant input to the approval process, especially when engaging with professional or statutory bodies, and form crucial membership of programme approval and Periodic Review.

The University invests heavily in gathering student feedback through routes such as: informal conversations between students, tutors and faculty staff; formal representation on committees and working groups; anonymous online surveys; and quality enhancement processes such as programme reviews. In our bid to raise response rates in the NSS and our annual in-house Student Perception Questionnaire (SPQ, which captures all undergraduate students outside the NSS pool), a project implementation group led by the UPSU President (2014/15) was tasked with creating an engaging approach to student surveys. This reinvigorated our institutional response rates for both surveys. In 2016/17, our NSS response rate was 77%, our highest institutional average achieved, and **above** the sector average of 67%. We have equally rigorous processes for acting on feedback to enhance the student experience. We employ SERIO, our research and intelligence agency, to analyse NSS and SPQ open comments to consistently identify patterns at subject, school, or University level and to take action, leading to, for example, opening the library 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Students' Union additional commentary on student engagement
UPSU works to support students through a range of different events from their first moments on campus. A personalised approach is taken to introduce students to University life; in 2016/17, UPSU delivered over 40 Welcome talks to new students. Feedback from students consistently highlights the significance of interventions that aid the promotion of wellbeing and reduction of stress. We recognise the contributions we make to the partnership approach to student wellbeing and welfare. One example of supporting student engagement has been to run campaigns and activities throughout the academic year. For example, during 2016/17, the Stress Less campaign engaged students in events to reduce stress before examinations. Student-led societies are an integral part of University life, and UPSU supports over 115 of them with over 3,800 student members. Increasing and deepening student engagement with activities that provide the opportunity for collaboration, debate and challenge within the context of deepening social connections and a sense of community is a key priority for us.

3.2 Valuing Teaching

We recognise the importance of high-quality teaching and are committed to recognising those who excel in this area. Our academic promotion criteria revised in 2016, expects a majority of staff to follow a 'balanced pathway', which includes evidence of quality teaching, research and external engagement. Currently, 86% of our academics have a significant student-facing and teaching role, allowing us to make a significant impact on the student experience.

The University's ambition is for all staff involved in teaching and assessment to be appropriately trained, including accreditation through the HEA or relevant professional body. All new academic staff are required to attain Fellowship of the HEA within their probationary period. A peer review scheme supports teaching enhancement with examples of excellent practice shared. Our *7 Steps* guides provide ongoing support on improving teaching and learning, and are very well received by academics in other universities.

Our HEA-accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice *(*PGCAP) and Teaching Development Framework demonstrate a commitment to teaching excellence and support for staff, and contribute positively to student outcomes. In 2017, we were above the sector median for the 'Teaching Quality' question bank in the NSS. In a recent evaluation, 99% of respondents reported that the PGCAP made them a better teacher and enhanced student learning. In 2016-17, 78 staff workshops on teaching and learning with 452 participants resulted in 86% of respondents reporting they gained new knowledge, 85% that it impacted on student learning and 78% that it increased their teaching confidence. Pedagogic innovation is supported through the Pedagogic Research and Teaching Innovation (PRTI) programme.

PRTI invests c£120k pa on initiatives that encourage teaching innovation and cross-disciplinary engagement. Since 2003, 275 projects have been supported through these schemes. The projects have also led to external funding for teaching development and encouraged National Teaching Fellowship applications. In one example, this ultimately led to both a Green Gown Award and the launch of a Europe-wide toolkit for embedding sustainability in nursing education.

Students' Union additional commentary on valuing teaching
The UPSU Student, Staff, Teaching and Representation (SSTAR) Awards (initiated by UPSU in 2007 in collaboration with the University) provide a way for students to recognise excellence within teaching. In 2017, 1,120 nominations were made for 17 awards, 30% for Inspirational Teaching, and 13% for Personal Tutoring. These awards are catalysts for change as analysis of both nominations and winners are shared with the Teaching and Learning Support team, further supporting the commitment to students as partners.

3.3 Rigour and Stretch

Our TLSE Strategy commits us to providing appropriate rigour and stretch for all students, including opportunities for personal development, to prepare our students to succeed in their professional and personal lives. We work closely with our students and UPSU to anticipate, understand and respond to student needs. We develop our students' understanding, skills and independence through programme design, high-quality teaching and assessment. Programme approval ensures students acquire, practice and enhance their intellectual, transferable and employability skills. It also confirms that programmes' assessment strategies are suitable in terms of rigour and stretch.

We deliver high-quality teaching, underpinned by our pedagogic research and our active engagement with over 50 professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, from the General Medical Council to the Royal Institute of British Architects. A focus on experiential learning ensures that our students are exposed to a range of active learning approaches, real-world applications and practical input from practitioners (see Section 5.2). All students on honours degrees engage in a research project that acts as a capstone to their studies and enables them to develop both a critical perspective and transferable skills that support their employability (Section 4.2). A number of our subjects offer four-year, level 7, integrated Master's programmes to advance students' knowledge and skills.

We have a rigorous process for appointing external examiners and analysing their reports. Training for external examiners, provided through an extensive web resource and an annual conference, ensures that high standards are maintained. External examiners' comments indicate that this practice is exemplary: *"I consider this type of conference [for new external examiners] to be an exemplar of good practice in HE."* (2017 delegate). External examiners' reports are used to enhance practice across the institution and recently prompted changes such as the inclusion of formative feedback across all programmes and the provision of detailed guidelines for assessing group work. All students can access these reports and responses and they are discussed at student-staff liaison meetings, by Programme Committees and through the University's External Examiners Subcommittee.

3.4 Feedback

The University has a strong record of performance in assessment and feedback, compared to the sector, which is reflected in student responses to the NSS and internal surveys. The University's Assessment policy outlines what students can expect, including clear guidelines and briefs, opportunities to engage with a range of assessment methods, fair assessment including anonymous marking where possible, and timely formative and summative feedback.

Feedback on assessment takes place both formally and informally, and students are encouraged by personal tutors, teaching, and support staff to reflect on the myriad of occasions they receive informal feedback and to engage with it constructively. In response to SPQ and NSS feedback, we are increasingly providing collective group feedback for students to promptly reflect on their assignments. Formal feedback on assessed work may take the form of face-to-face, written, or audio commentary, with an ongoing emphasis on how students can improve and take learning forward from a particular formal assessment, even if they receive high marks: *"Feedback in the final year has been very good, and has helped me to improve coursework significantly with detailed critical points."* (NSS 2017)

The CEP was successful in encouraging early assessment and feedback, with the 'early adopter' programmes recording an increase to 91% of students who submitted work for assessment by the end of the first term. The proportion who found the feedback helpful increased by 10%. To ensure that assessment provides sufficient challenge, a CEP-driven policy change in 2014/15 led to first year marks contributing 10% of final degree classifications.

Despite the University's relatively high proportion of students with disabilities (15%), a determined focus on inclusive assessment has seen a decline in the use of modified assessments. Recognised as a leader in this area, our web-based 'one stop' inclusive teaching and assessment resource for staff and students has been adopted by at least ten other UK universities, and it is one of three university websites listed as good practice on 'Embedding Equality and Diversity in the Curriculum' in the HEA Scotland guidance.

Students' Union additional commentary on feedback
In collaboration with faculties, schools and programme teams, UPSU supports the Academic Representation system, with around 800 Course Level Representatives and 17 School Representatives elected annually to ensure that the student voice is fed into every level of University committees, from programmes through to Senate and the Board of Governors. To ensure a student-led approach, representatives are fully trained by UPSU. More than 800 representatives were trained and supported during 2016/17, facilitating strong leadership and empowering students to take key responsibilities such as chairing. The Academic Representatives are able to attend an education focused student-led forum, chaired by the Part-Time Academic Officer. This role works closely with the Vice President Education sabbatical position as well as the School Level Representatives, who also have a seat on the Union Council, ensuring a wide range of diverse student views influence decision making.

4. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

An integral part of improving the quality of our students' learning experience is our commitment to ensuring the availability and effective use of excellent physical and digital learning resources. We are above benchmark for the Learning Environment full-time core metrics 'academic support' and 'continuation'. We are very close to the boundaries for positive flags with indicator values (above benchmark) and Z-scores of 1.4% and 3.4 standard deviations, and 1.3% and 6.6 standard deviations respectively. For the corresponding split metrics, we are above benchmark for 97% (37/38) of the split indicators with four positive flags.

4.1 Resources

The University has made significant investment into learning resources and teaching space, devoting £208.5 million over the past ten years. Developments in the physical and digital service, environment and resources provided by Library and Digital Support (LDS) have been informed by student feedback, which is evidenced by an increase in question 16 (question 19 in 2017) NSS outcomes from 82% (2011-12) to 89.4% (2016-17), +8% above the sector median. In 2016-17, all three components of the Learning Resources section were in Quartile 1 with a section average of 87.7% (+7.7% above the sector median).

These data are supported by open-ended comments praising the University facilities:
"We have access to very modern technology within the laboratories in the University, and most relevant scientific journals are available through the online library website." (NSS 2017)

Changes to the library's social and quiet learning spaces have been developed after listening to students' needs. For example, students have mapped on- and off-campus learning spaces and described their ideal attributes. As a result, a new comfortable but quiet study space and a postgraduate zone, including space for undergraduates to explore postgraduate study, opened in 2017. A noise text alert/reporting facility was piloted in 2015 and extended in 2016.

The University's eTextbook service provides the majority of first-year students with personal access to core texts in digital format. This initiative, which received the 2013 *Guardian* University Award for Teaching Excellence and was shortlisted in the 'Outstanding Support for Students' category of the 2013 *THE* Awards, is sector-leading and a key resource within our learning environment. Through this we also support our disabled students (eTexts are provided in EPUB accessible format with 'read aloud' functionality), and our survey results indicate that 66% of students (rising to 72% in the BME population) would not have purchased these core titles. Conversely, the survey revealed that students in the least affluent POLAR quartile appear more likely to spend money on textbooks than the overall student population. This scheme addresses these hidden costs and helps to level the academic playing field by providing all students with equity of access to key readings so that they can transition effectively into higher education. Of student survey respondents, 92.6% believe the scheme is a good idea, with 94.8% saying it will help them access core reading throughout their studies (these figures rise to 98% in both categories for BME survey respondents).

The introduction of a new platform for 2017-18 has enriched opportunities for personalised learning through new interactive and collaborative features. In 2017-18, 87.4% of first-year undergraduates received eTextbook titles with provision in every school. By December 2017, 12,552 copies of the 15,460 purchased in August had been downloaded, with over 69,000 pages read, 13,241 highlights made and 12,987 searches performed within the texts. In due course, these engagement figures will contribute to a suite of institutional learning analytics.

Our on- and off-campus developments facilitate real or simulated learning opportunities. For example:
• The Marine Station, a £5 million bespoke teaching, research and diving centre with a laboratory and seawater aquarium that enables students to undertake scientific diving courses as well as fieldwork and interdisciplinary projects.
• The House, a £7 million performing arts centre with 230-seat theatre, was designed in consultation with an internationally-acclaimed integrated dance academic (and National Teaching Fellow), resulting in a facility that sets new standards in accessibility.
• Our Dental Education Facilities allow students to work with some of the best qualified dental professionals and, since 2009, have provided a range of dental services to 34,073 registered patients across the region including socially disadvantaged groups such as the homeless.
• The Marine Building, a £19 million facility that boasts wave tanks and flumes for physical model testing by students on marine and mechanical engineering degrees, as well as a navigation centre with a full bridge simulator used by navigation and shipping students as they learn to pilot vessels in virtual seas.

These are unique, world-class teaching and research facilities that enable students to gain professional qualifications and valuable industry-related experience.

Our Digital Learning Environment (DLE), introduced in 2014, integrates multiple learning technologies to allow students and staff to access resources to support technology-enhanced learning and teaching. Our Academic Support, Technology and Innovation (ASTI) department is responsible for our digital learning platforms, sharing pedagogic practice, and developing

student support materials in the embedding of Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) within the curriculum. Around 20,000 students access the DLE daily via our mobile app (Section 4.3). The embedding of TEL into the curriculum has, between 2015-17, seen a 96% increase in embedded teaching and learning resources, and there has been a 102% increase in the use of wiki-based activity. Content Capture using Panopto, introduced in 2015, has seen an 800% increase in use in 2017, with 99,000 views of content. ASTI were runners-up of the Association of Learning Technology's Team of the Year Award in 2015.

4.2 Research, Scholarship and Professional Practice

Our TLSE Strategy ensures our commitment to research-informed teaching is supported by our strong research academics and activities. In the Research Excellence Framework (REF 2014), 63% of our research was classified as world leading or internationally excellent. Our research power ensures our students are exposed to staff that are leaders in their field. In 2017, Iain Stewart, UNESCO Professor of Geoscience Communication and Director of the Sustainable Earth Institute, received the Outstanding Contribution to Public Understanding of the Geosciences award from the American Geosciences Institute in recognition of his academic work and broadcasting career including multiple BBC documentaries. Richard Thompson, Professor of Marine Biology, received an OBE in the 2018 New Year Honours List, for Services to Marine Science, reflecting his status as a world-leading authority on the sources of, and problems caused by, marine plastics, and one whose research has directly influenced recent policy change on microbeads. All of our internationally renowned academics are heavily involved in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching.

All students have opportunities to undertake an independent project that consolidates their knowledge, and guides them towards future work or study. This has included an art history field trip to Vienna, creating a research database of West Country buildings from student coursework, initiating a transnational debate among European students about the nature of national identities, and enhancing research skills training in marine biology. It also resulted in the setting up of several student research journals, presenting at the British Conference of Undergraduate Research (BCUR), and co-authored journal articles.

The University and UPSU have well-established connections with employers, research organisations and PSRBs (Sect 3.3). These connections are important for creating real-world opportunities and exposure to professional practice for students. For example, more than 60 leading figures in marine renewable energy and offshore wind, representing both academia and industry, attended a recent workshop staged by the University regarding the new ORE Supergen Hub, a programme supported by government and industry.

Sustainability education driven by research has been core to the University for more than 15 years. A recent curriculum audit found more than 60% of our programmes incorporated sustainability. This student demand for sustainability education has been highlighted by the annual NUS student skills and future employment survey, where in the last three years, our students have provided twice as many responses to this survey than any other institution. Plymouth was ranked first in 2010 and 2014 as overall best performing university in the People & Planet Green League, and won a 2016 Green Gown Award for Sustainability Reporting. Internally, students, staff and executive members work on the Sustainability Advisory Committee to further develop our sustainable campus, to enable learning and to motivate the next generation of students.

Students' Union additional commentary on research, scholarship and professional practice
The partnership between UPSU and the University was further strengthened through gaining the Responsible Futures three-year award in 2014/15. This national, student-focused quality measure of a whole institution's commitment to social responsibility and sustainability reflects the deep collaborative approach, and, recognises the enabling environment for sustainability

learning. Highlights from the audit, conducted by trained student auditors, included: strong evidence of a shared strategy; significant shared ownership of the agenda; and a strong informal curriculum delivered within UPSU, providing a vast amount of sustainability focused opportunities for students.

4.3 Personalised Learning

A strong support culture, embedded personal tutoring system, and building and maintaining relationships with students from pre-arrival to alumni status are core to our ongoing commitment to personalised learning. For example, before arrival, academic staff engage with applicants during bespoke Applicant Days, while graduates of the University have free and full access to our Careers & Employability Service for three years following graduation.

Personalised learning is underpinned by the University's Personal Tutoring Policy, which recognises the tutor as pivotal in facilitating students' transition to HE and engagement with their studies. Tutorials enable students to monitor their progress, be aware of wider opportunities and reflect where their studies fit with career development. A review of this policy in 2012 led to the new role of Senior Personal Tutor for each subject or school. Students are, of course, strongly encouraged to speak to their academic and support staff at an individual level, and the success of this is reflected in the NSS. In 2017, 87.3% of our students agreed that they had been able to contact staff when they needed to, above the sector median of 86.2%. In our most recent SPQ survey, this figure was 88.2%.

Specific University initiatives offering holistic support include SUM:UP a drop-in service for any student needing support in mathematics and statistics, supporting over 1,200 visits annually. In addition, the Writing Café's trained staff and student mentors support individuals to improve their academic writing, providing sessions for ~7,500 students annually.

The *Mobile with Plymouth* app has been designed based on continuous student feedback, and gives students access to course information, personalised timetables, course feedback, library resources, access to the PebblePad and all DLE content. Since 2014, over 33,000 students have registered and the app has more than 13,000 daily users. Usage of the *Mobile with Plymouth* app involves 80% learning activities and the app is the *de facto* student portal. In 2014, Plymouth was one of the first UK HEIs to provide all students and staff with access to Lynda.com and 13,000 users have watched 310,000 educational videos.

Student mental health and wellbeing is of national concern. In 2016-17, our Student Counselling team worked with 6% of our students, providing 1,431 individuals with 4,413 appointments. an increase of 20% from 2015/16. The volunteer-staffed Listening Post offered immediate access to help for students in distress on 263 occasions in 2016/17. The Mental Health support team, provided 2,062 one-to-one appointments, compared to 468 the previous year. Our open access Mental Health Drop-In Service had its first full year in 2016/17, recording 353 visits. We are one of three universities offering Schwartz Rounds to provide a structured forum for staff and students to explore the emotional aspects of their work.

Personal support for our substantial care leaver population (more than 100 students, who do not have appropriate family backing to rely on) is provided by our Care Leaver Advice Officer, without whom many students would not be in higher education:

'It's my family at university and without it I don't think I would have stayed this year' (Care leaver student, 2014)

5. STUDENT OUTCOMES AND LEARNING GAIN

We are concerned that our metrics for employment and highly skilled employment are below benchmark. We face two main challenges that we are addressing strategically: a focus on our

students' employability behaviours (a feature of our regional student base, their backgrounds and aspirations), and our region's low higher skilled employment context. As described in Section 2.1, over 60% of our students come from the South West and over 65% remain in the region to work. A key factor in our employability data is therefore the very strong affinity between our graduates and the region. Those who remain do so for important personal reasons in spite of fewer higher skilled opportunities and lower salaries.

Our employability strategy has four aims: (1) An institutional focus on experiential and work-based learning throughout the curriculum underpinned by: (2) dedicated support for students' employability skills and behaviours through our Careers & Employability Service (CES), with a particular focus on early adaptation to the world of work; (3) strong relationships with employers, our links with Plymouth Science Park, and industry bodies to provide employment opportunities; and (4) supporting students' ambitions for developing businesses or social enterprises. Our strategic approach is working and we are confident that this will continue to improve students' prospects and outcomes. The data confirm our progress in this direction:

- 'employment or further study' has improved from 89.1% (2011/12) to 92.9% (2016/17) (TEF core metric data)
- 'highly skilled employment or further study' has improved from 62.1% to 70.6% (TEF data)
- 93% (26/28) of split indicators for these two metrics have improved over the three-year period
- significant progress is demonstrated by our 'highly skilled employment' indicator (70.6% in year 3) being within 1.3% of the core benchmark
- 14th greatest improvement (amongst TEF2 HEIs) in 'professional employment or further study' for full- and part-time students over the three-year period (+10.3%; HESA data)
- close to benchmark for both 'sustained employment or further study' and 'above median earnings threshold or further study' in LEO.

5.1 Employment and Further Study

The Careers & Employability Service (CES) works with our students (and graduates) to ensure the service best meets their needs. It was ranked 14th in the 2017 Top 20 Career Services (as voted by students in 'Student Crowd'). Our central 'on-demand' service and online resources are delivered from the Careers & Employability Hub. Events include: careers fairs; 'Accelerate' programmes (career development workshops); FLUX business competitions (in which we have been national winners for five out of the last ten years), and employer/alumni networking evenings. We run six careers fairs annually attracting 350 employers and engaging *c*5,000 students. Examples of employers who have attended recently include the Civil Service Fast Stream scheme, IBM, BT, PwC, Aldi, NHS, Lidl, AECOM, Mott MacDonald and BMW Group.

Contributing to growing the regional economy supports our graduates who remain in the South West. We are active members of both our Local Enterprise Partnerships (Heart of the South West; Cornwall & Isles of Scilly). Working with our regional partners, the University has accessed and managed £21 million of Regional Growth Funds (RGF) accelerating the expansion of SMEs across the region, creating 2,592 jobs, 600 at graduate level. Seen as a leader in this area, we are the first university to deliver an RGF programme, and first RGF programme nationally to be operational.

Our increased efforts in this area meant that 2016-17 saw the highest ever number of annual graduate start-ups (30) and a further 37 graduate companies have survived for three years. This gives a total of 84 companies, with 148 FTE staff and a combined annual turnover of £890k. The support that these new entrepreneurs receive through the Formation Zone programmes (which have won a national award for Achievement in Business Incubation from UKBI) and our focus on young entrepreneurs led to the University being the first higher education institution in the country to receive accreditation from NEF: The Innovation Institute.

We are co-founders, along with Plymouth City Council, of Plymouth Science Park (PSP), the largest in the South West, supporting the University and city to further scientific development, innovation and commercialisation. PSP encourages student engagement, promotes our graduates, and supports wider collaborative opportunities. Some of our graduates have been supported to run successful businesses based at PSP while others have accessed employment opportunities. In partnership with us, and funded from our HEIF awards, PSP will promote our student talent, and increase the number of high value jobs for graduates. Of particular note will be the establishment of an accredited business incubator with a particular focus on student and graduate start-ups.

We promote postgraduate opportunities to enable our students to deepen and broaden their qualifications. All final-year students are encouraged to explore postgraduate study, and we run postgraduate recruitment and open evenings. Our graduates receive a 10% (being increased to 15-20%) alumni fee discount and some of our programmes make automatic offers of places on postgraduate taught programmes on completion of a Plymouth undergraduate degree (at an agreed grade), which removes the need for students to have to formally apply for these programmes. We have seen an increase of 5.5% in undergraduates continuing in further study (19.4% to 24.9%) over the last three years. We are the third highest improver in the South West region (2013/14 to 2015/16) in this regard, and in the top third nationally.

Students' Union additional commentary on employment and further study
Within the University, UPSU makes a significant contribution to support students to gain the best possible graduate employment. We recognise ourselves as a key developer and employer of students, and offer an array of paid employment, supporting personal and skills development; during 2016/17 over 49,000 hours of paid student staff time was completed.

5.2 Employability and Transferable Skills

The development of our students' employability skills and opportunities is a key strategic activity. Chaired by the DVC (Education and Student Experience), the University Employability Working Group oversees all aspects of strategy covering our careers service, embedding employability in our curriculum, student aspirations and placements. Our founding principle of experiential learning offers opportunities both in vocational and academic contexts. Given the importance of work experience to employment success, all undergraduate students have the opportunity to engage in significant placement activity with 4,500 students annually engaged in placements or work-based learning. The importance of experiential learning underpins our curriculum development. For example, our medical, dental and nursing students work (under supervision) with patients in the community, and our law students provide *pro bono* clinics on family matters, employment rights, tenancy advice and more, to people in Plymouth.

Placements and work-based learning form a core part of our employer engagement. In addition to Subject or School Advisory Panels, when developing potential new programmes of study or reviewing existing programmes, we engage with employers, PSRBs and alumni and undertake direct research to ensure the programme will focus on the skills required by employers. (Almost a third of our programmes have PSRB accreditation or recognition.) For example we invite employers to review our courses and before approving new programmes, evidence is requested regarding the potential employment market and opportunities.

Employability and skills development initiatives are recognised within our institution-wide Plymouth Award, which documents the learning that students have achieved through engagement with activities outside their programme of study. Awardees complete 80 hours across three activities and a reflective essay. Plymouth Extra is a comprehensive database of opportunities to enable students to maximise their time at University and to translate this as an asset for future employers. Most of the 250 activities in Plymouth Extra are mapped against

our graduate attributes framework (Plymouth Compass) and are recognised in our students' Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR).

Starting at induction, we use Career Registration to capture students' career aspirations. These data inform tailored interventions, for example with groups of disadvantaged students or at programme level. As well as subject-specific careers provision delivered across the faculties, CES works with employability leads in each school and has developed a suite of resources to support employability in the curriculum. For example, Geography students benefit from an early introduction to employability followed by a compulsory module including mock applications and interviews, and are offered a relevant six-month or one-year placement.

Recognising the high levels of self-employment in our region, we provide support for any student or recent graduate considering self-employment or starting a social enterprise:

- Our Growth Acceleration and Investment Network (GAIN) aims to accelerate the creation and growth of high quality businesses and to stimulate jobs in the South West. In collaboration with CES, GAIN supports students through industry-provided mentors to raise career aspirations, and through Inspiring Futures, which offers experience via consultancy projects. In the last six years, more than 3,500 students have undertaken 600 projects with more than 250 organisations.
- Entrepreneurial students can also access our award-winning incubation service. Formation Zone provides a focused environment for the start-up and early years of trading, providing space and business advice on flexible and affordable terms. Eighty-five graduates have accessed support and space. We also manage three regional innovation centres in Cornwall, which host more than 100 businesses, supporting them to develop and provide graduate opportunities.

A recent example of how we are addressing the challenges of our region is the Tamar Engineering Project (TEP) that combines employer engagement, widening participation and employability. This has been inspired by alumnus Stephen Ball, previously CEO of Lockheed Martin UK. TEP provides students with £4,500 for each year of study, one-to-one mentoring with industry CEOs and directors and access to networks to build experience and confidence.

"*Industry brings funding, but more importantly expertise and support in the shape of individual mentoring for students. […] We now have major international corporations committing to support students through their studies and see no impediment to us maintaining the growth of student numbers.*" (Stephen Ball, joint TEP founder).

Our Alumni Engagement Team recognises the importance of engaging alumni to inspire students and connect them into wider professional and industry-specific networks. Launched in 2015, Plymouth Connect matches students with alumni to get one-to-one advice online. In the last year, Plymouth alumni have volunteered over 2,500 hours to support students, for example, attending the career networking evenings and participating in the six-month face-to-face Employer Mentoring Programme, designed to support students maximise employment opportunities.

With a strong lead from UPSU (see below), we recognise the benefit of volunteering for our students' confidence and employability skills, as well as for our community. Volunteering is embedded in the Plymouth Compass, and of the students who completed the 2017 annual volunteering survey, 78% stated that volunteering had increased their employability.

Students' Union Additional Commentary on Employability and Transferable Skills
Employability is a key strategic priority for UPSU and our alignment with the University is a clear demonstration of our partnership. Our unique contribution is recognised and valued across the campus community in our comprehensive volunteering service, located within UPSU. This work has attained Investing in Volunteers accreditation, facilitating student-led

projects with 87 not-for-profit organisations, to broker cross-sector volunteering experiences. Opportunities include areas such as community development, environment and sustainability, education and health. During 2016/17, students developed over 50 volunteer leader roles and captured 24,042 hours of community volunteering. During 2015/16, UPSU allocated additional resources to further develop our approach to employability, and this has led to developments in the training provided to students by us, as well as systems and processes to ensure students can articulate their learning for employability.

5.3 Positive Outcomes

We have a clear and continued commitment to widening participation and are successful in achieving a positive experience, especially for our disadvantaged students. For the following full-time groups: mature, Polar Q1 & Q2, National IMD Q1-2, BME and disabled students, we are above benchmark for 95% (19/20) of the four Teaching Quality and Learning Environment split indicators, with five + flags for mature and BME students. Improvement in the Student Outcomes metrics is being addressed as described above (Sections 5.1and 5.2).

Our approach to working with all our students is embedded through the TLSE Strategy with commitments to develop inclusive learning and assessment opportunities, broaden support for learning through tutoring, peer support initiatives and learning development opportunities. We target induction support in all years to facilitate transition onto and through our programmes to raise the aspirations and achievements of students and improve retention.

Approximately 15% of our students have declared disabilities (2016/17). The reduction of the UK Disability Students Allowance has prompted new ways of supporting these students from being applicants to becoming alumni. Developments arising from the monitoring of equality, diversity and inclusion data are included in our action planning processes, and are discussed through the University's *Annual Equality Report*. Students are represented on the University's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee and Athena SWAN Self-Evaluation teams. The University is also proud to report we are successfully recruiting to two degree apprenticeships in collaboration with our academic partners. We are currently working with our employers and partners to further expand this portfolio.

The University remains committed to financially supporting students from challenging backgrounds, including the Mayflower Award which provides £2.3 million for students with household income below £25k, and Care Leavers Bursaries which provide £2,000 annually for home students who have been in care. Plymouth continues to be a model of good practice in the sector. Feedback demonstrates students value the financial and staff support.

6. JOINT CONCLUDING STATEMENT FROM THE UNIVERSITY AND STUDENTS' UNION

We are jointly committed to the ethos of 'Students as Partners' highlighted in this submission. Above-benchmark metrics in Teaching Quality and Learning Environment demonstrate how institutional strategy informs actions that deliver consistently high-quality teaching and learning, underpinned by the translation of pedagogic expertise. We continue in our mission to improve Student Outcomes responding to the specific geographic, social and economic challenges of our region. Consistently improving metrics show how the transformational changes we have implemented since 2012 are significantly improving our employability outcomes. We encourage students to become the architects of their own learning and development. Our focus on experiential learning, professional practice and the partnership between the University and UPSU ensure that impact on our graduates goes beyond the data to the individual stories of transformation and success, from induction to alumni.