1. INTRODUCTION

Staffordshire University, founded in 1914, set out to be a modern, relevant and vocationally inspired institution, working with local industry (initially ceramics, mining and engineering) to support regional economic growth and provide opportunities for the people of Staffordshire. We have built on our strong heritage and mission and, as 'The Connected University', we continue to deliver innovative and applied learning, develop talented people and connect our communities to opportunities that will support them to improve economically, societally and culturally.

Supporting aspiration and achievement for students from a wide variety of backgrounds, cultures and interests, the University supports learners both on campus, via distance learning and through provision in public and private partner organisations in the UK and overseas.

The University was reassured that we were on the right trajectory when in 2017 we were awarded the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 'Silver' in recognition of the progress made in improving learning and teaching, graduate success and employability through a culture that facilitates, recognises and rewards excellent teaching, and a strategic approach to the significant investment in both physical and digital infrastructure to support student learning and the wider student experience.

The ongoing delivery of our strategic plan, underpinned by a refreshed academic strategy and Faculty restructure, marked a step-change in the University's approach and positive journey in relation to our outcomes for students. This is demonstrated through our continued improvements in the key metrics relating to student satisfaction and graduate success.

The University exceeds its benchmarks for teaching quality, learning environment and graduate outcomes but is currently marginally below benchmark for continuation rates, a point which we are actively addressing. For this reason, the University's submission focuses on the need to actively engage in every stage of the student journey to support the achievement of learner's potential and aspiration, and to fundamentally contribute to a strong regional and local economy.

The impact and effectiveness of our approach is demonstrated through these sector-wide measures and through internal performance measures cited in our submission.

- Top 10 nationally for student satisfaction for Teaching Quality (2017 & 2018).*
- Top 10 nationally for student satisfaction for Assessment and Feedback (2017 & 2018).**
- Above sector average for our student satisfaction in all NSS questions (2018).
- Above HESA benchmarks for Employment Performance Index and for Graduate Prospects (2017 & 2018).

**Source – Good University Guide 2019*

***Source – Guardian University League Tables 2019*

This submission has been contributed to, and endorsed, by our students through the involvement of our Students' Union. We are collaborative in every aspect of the University's operation, from

curriculum design and student support to governance and management, and this approach is reflected in this paper.

2. CONTEXT

The University recognises the challenging context in which it operates. We have developed an ambitious long-term strategy, which extends beyond the time horizon of the current Strategic Plan. The communities the University serves, and works in partnership with, face fundamental socio-economic challenges affecting life chances including access to higher education, student success and progression from university. Our main campus is in Stoke-on-Trent, with Centres of Excellence for Health in Stafford and Shrewsbury, and 30% of our students are drawn from the local Stoke-on-Trent area. 30.2% of neighbourhoods in Stoke-on-Trent are classed as being in the most deprived 10% nationally, placing the Local Authority joint 14th overall in the index of Multiple Deprivation (DCLG IMD). Our students have well-established and distinctive characteristics:

- **Commuter Students:** 56% of our full-time student commute to the University, which presents a range of recognised challenges that the University is actively addressing.
- **Low Participation**: 45% of student are drawn from lowest participation neighbourhoods (POLAR4 Quintile 1 & 2), including 47% of full-time undergraduate students and 39% of our part-time undergraduate students. 27.9% of our students are from bottom 2 deciles of the deprivation category: 'Income deprivation affecting children'.
- **Mature students**: 45% of students are classified as mature on entry, including 33% of full-time (21% nationally) and 92% of part-time students (89% nationally).
- **Black Asian Minority Ethnic (BAME)**: 20% of our students are from a BAME background, including 22% of full-time undergraduates (21% nationally) and 12% part-time undergraduates (16% nationally).
- **Disability:** 15% of student have a declared disability, including 10% of full-time undergraduates (13% nationally) and 7.5% part-time undergraduates (18% nationally).

In terms of access and participation we exceed the OfS benchmarks for the proportion of young full-time entrants from state schools and from low participation neighbourhoods, and the proportion of mature entrants on undergraduate programmes.

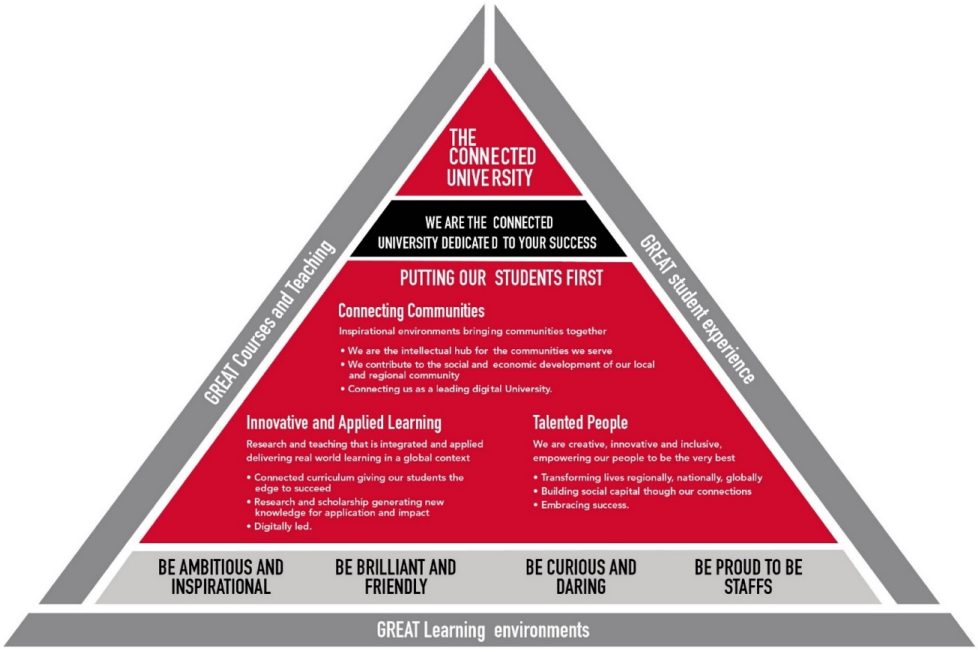
We are particularly active in the delivery of part-time higher education, despite the funding disparities that have caused other providers to reduce their part-time provision. We are proud to have been an early proponent of fast-track (accelerated) degree programmes and we are now one of the largest higher education providers of higher and degree apprenticeships, working with local and national employers.

A number of our Schools support learners from the Ministry of Defence, studying part-time to enhance both their military careers and re-training after discharge or retirement. The partnership has established the groundwork for other major partnership delivery schemes and continues to bring benefits to the wider student body and HM Armed Forces. This group of students have unique characteristics with many having significant professional qualifications and with our wrap around support these students have high retention rates (91% (3 year average)) and high achievement rates (91% (3 year average)).

> "Despite the course being an Online Distance Learning (ODL) course, the academic staff were always reachable, provided solutions and advice within 24hrs of asking. Halfway through the course I had to take an academic sabbatical period due to a 6-month deployment. The University staff were very helpful prior to and during this period. On my return I was quickly and seamlessly able to re-start my studies and complete the course to a high level. Overall, a very good service." M*oD student*

3. STRATEGY AND IMPACT: THE CONNECTED UNIVERSITY

The Strategic Plan 2016-2021, approved by the Board of Governors in 2016, clearly sets out the University's intent to put students first and at the heart of everything we do. Building on our strong heritage and mission and, as 'The Connected University', we are dedicated to the success of our students, staff and partners.



We are achieving our goals through our core strategies of connected communities; innovative and applied learning; and talented people. Co-created and delivered with our students, our focus on providing "great courses and teaching" and "great learning environments" ultimately lead to a great student experience.

We have set ourselves ambitious targets, and our aim is to secure year-on-year improvements to, where possible, consistently exceed HESA benchmarks and the stretching internal measures by which we evaluate continuously our performance. Given the complex challenges facing our student community, we have established a whole-institution approach to performance evaluation and management and evidence-based decision-making. We have a KPI framework that monitors inputs, outputs, impacts and drives performance, ensuring we focus on areas that demonstrate tangible benefits to the students' experience and the achievement of our key strategic aims.

In 2016/17 we undertook a review of our academic infrastructure, moving from four large bureaucratic Faculties to six smaller Schools with an aim of breaking down silos, providing a more

cohesive subject mix to facilitate cross-University collaboration and ensuring that we focus on improving performance.

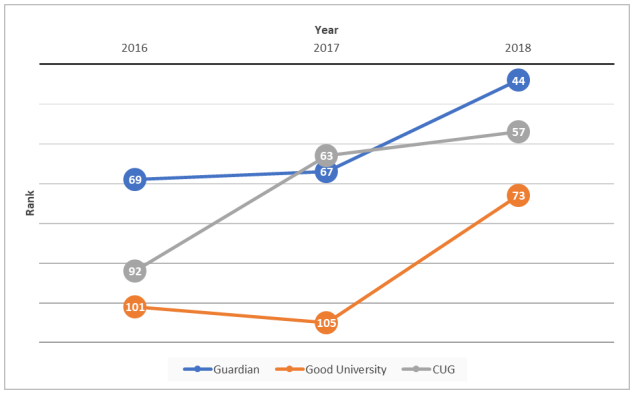
To empower our Schools and Services, we introduced dashboards on all areas of performance and the KPIs. These have been invaluable to evaluate the impact of our work and to identify where good practice sits, so that it can be shared with other parts of the University. Wherever possible our KPIs align with sector-data sets to accurately benchmark year-on-year progress to the wider sector and universities that work with students with similar challenges.

Data Driven

All staff in the University have access to the dashboards providing live data (and data for year-on-year analysis) drawn from our data warehouse. These allow staff to drill down to different groups of students and to compare their performance profile with the wider population. We have dashboards related to both admissions (including the profile of entrants, home location and their former school or college) and student success. We also have a dedicated dashboard to track in greater detail BAME student success and are rolling this out for other vulnerable groups such as commuter students. The use of the BAME dashboard has enabled us to identify areas where we have continued challenges and areas of good practice. This has enabled the development of our detailed action plan to close the BAME attainment gap which has reduced from 39.4% in 2016/2017 and to 19.8% in 2017/2018. Although this shows an improvement, we expect our continuing interventions to drive further improvements to narrow the gap.

We perform detailed analysis of different student groups and courses to understand which of our students need extra support and where we need to focus the effort to enable student success and progression. In 2018/19 we moved from annual monitoring to continuous monitoring to facilitate Schools in acting swiftly to identify improvements and respond with agility to maximise impact. We undertake an annual review of our University-level KPIs and in autumn 2018 we introduced a number of new performance measures to assist Schools in evaluating factors affecting academic performance and student success. We were also pleased to raise our target for one KPI as we had achieved our 2022 target by 2018: satisfaction for assessment and feedback in NSS was raised from 80% to 83%. Our governing body enthusiastically approved these changes along with our new integrated monthly health-check report for each School (and Department) which brings together the intelligence from our dashboards and other reports in a single place that was introduced in November 2018. An equivalent course health check is under development which will enable us to interrogate and respond to course level data.

Impact



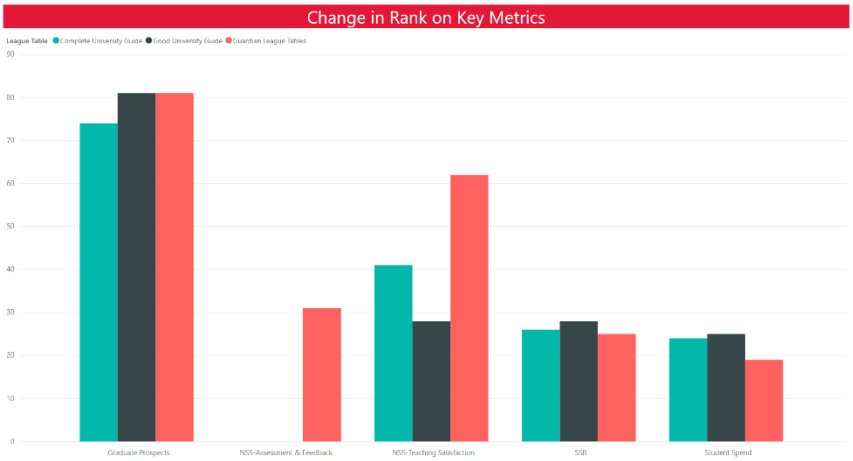
The collective impact of our work is best summarised by our overall performance in UK league tables. We have risen significantly in three league tables since 2016 and we are now in the top 50% in both the Times and Sunday Times' *Good University Guide* and the Guardian's League Tables. We were the highest climber in the Complete University Guide (2019) published in April 2018; and jointly the highest climber in the *Good University Guide* (2018), published September 2017. In 2017, we were 'Proud to Be Staffs' (one of four values) because we were awarded the 'Most Improved Student Experience' in the Times Higher Education Awards. This award is based on student survey outcomes as opposed to self-nomination.

These achievements are attributed to improvements in four key areas:

- Graduate Prospects – the area has seen the most improvement in performance: from 57.3% (in 2016 result) to 81.5% (in 2018 results). We are also proud of the sustained employment

rates over 1, 3 and 5 years of our graduates, which are above the benchmark for the University.

- Student Satisfaction – in 2018 our student and staff celebrated the University being ranked 9th for Quality of Teaching in the Times' *Good University Guide* (up from 10th the year before) and 8th for Assessment and Feedback in the Guardian League Table (up from 9th the year before). At the same time we sustained our overall student satisfaction rates in NSS at a time when overall satisfaction in the sector decreased.
- Through our Campus Transformation Project (commended by the TEF panel in 2017) and other related initiatives, we have invested more in Academic Services and our facilities. We were ranked 23rd in 2018 in the Guardian League Table for expenditure per student (+16 place from the previous year) and the Times' league table measure of Service and Facilities Spend we moved 28 places to 70th in 2018.



Metric	Graduate Prospects			NSS-Assessment & Feedback			NSS-Teaching Satisfaction			SSR			Student Spend		
League Table	2016 Rank	2018 Rank	Change	2016 Rank	2018 Rank	Change	2016 Rank	2018 Rank	Change	2016 Rank	2018 Rank	Change	2016 Rank	2018 Rank	Change
omplete University Guide	113	39	74				54	13	41	58	32	26	39	15	24
Good University Guide	122	41	81				37	9	28	58	30	28	95	70	25
Guardian League Tables	122	41	81	39	8	31	99	37	62	54	29	25	42	23	19

As we continue to redesign our curriculum to ensure it remains relevant and prepares our graduates appropriately, we have improved our staff-student ratios.

Committed to an innovative teaching and learning strategy which develops our students as active, global, digital citizens, we are introducing a new Connected Curriculum. It is our ambition to embed this across all Schools in the University, engaging our students in opportunities to develop their social capital through interdisciplinary working and projects and networking; thereby preparing them with the breadth of skills and knowledge required by employers, raising their aspirations, and delivering an excellent student experience. The impact will be measured against our KPIs through retention, progression, graduate outcomes and qualitative feedback through student surveys.

4. PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST: THE STUDENT JOURNEY PROJECT OVERVIEW

To ensure a coherent high-quality experience for all students at each stage of their education, the University has established the Student Journey project. Initiated March 2017 it takes a holistic approach to the student lifecycle delivered through cross-cutting workstreams to address the intersectionality of disadvantaged groups.

It spans the journey from outreach and recruitment through transition to university, retention, supporting academic success to the development of wider employability attributes that lead to employment or further study. Interventions have been designed to make improvements for all students with bespoke journeys created for the wide range of students we cater for e.g. commuter,

low household income, BAME and disability. Each workstream has a constituent membership of students, academic and professional service staff working in partnership to maximise impact and embed the outputs within both University and Student Union mainstream activity.

This approach has contributed to improvements in the University's student experience and supports our work on raising continuation rates and student outcomes, examples of which are outlined below.

4.1 EARLY INTERVENTIONS

Our key to widening access, increasing attainment and progression to higher education in areas of low participation is to deliver through sustained and early interventions, as supported by national research. We work in partnership to deliver meaningful activities that promote the benefits of studying for a higher-level qualification and increase aspiration, not only in the individual but in the wider family and community.

To support progression from partner institutions we have introduced a Staffordshire University Passport Scheme – an online portal with individual student (pre-applicant) login. Working in collaboration with NCOP Higher Horizons+ and the Stoke Opportunity Area, it offers transferable credit, which celebrates and recognises participation in extra-curricular events and activities for students in years 7 – 13, including academic enrichment for careers advisors and students alike. Value-added Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) is given, including materials such as a 'Helping Hands' personal statement widget, alongside significant academic initiatives through interactive webinars and lectures, in a scheme set up to celebrate participation and support engagement and achievement.

The initiation of Subject Clubs, providing specific curriculum enrichment for years 11 – 13, is assisting with students' current post-16 studies and map progression pathways into HE. The Subject Clubs are tailored to help students contextualise academic studies within a real-world framework to help them recognise potential future employability. Both the Passport Scheme and the Subject Clubs form part of a new Framework Progression Partner Network – implementing a long-term strategy to engage more consistently with all our progression partner institutions, facilitating seamless student progression, particularly for those from the local area (future commuting students). It is aimed at raising attainment and aspirations to progress to higher education, ensuring regular exposure to higher education academic enrichment activities at their local institution. This is being measured through longitudinal studies.

Our work with the Stoke Opportunity Area collaborative partnership links us with many local agencies and charities, particularly around:

- Priority 4: Improving choices young people make from 16
- Priority 2: Improving outcomes in English, Maths and Science at Level 2

In 2019 / 20 we will introduce our Connecting Communities Mobile Classroom. This is a multi-use classroom on wheels which will continue to widen access in some of the hardest to reach communities in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire and Shrewsbury with subject- specific taster events for all ages.

Our plans include connecting thousands of young people to mobile IAG and academic outreach, enabling us to interact with many more students at local, regional and national events. The University hosted the Big Bang West Midlands Fair in June 2018 and had 2,000 people registered, with a target for over 3,000 for 2019.

4.2 TRANSITION

Spiral Induction

The Spiral induction working group focuses on building identity, creating a sense of 'Proud to be Staffs' and 'connection' to Staffordshire University for all students whether new or progressing and regardless of mode of study. Induction commences during the welcome periods and follows transition through the student's academic journey. During its inception focus groups involving students, Students' Union officers, academic staff and support staff examined the issues affecting student experience, particularly during transition and progression periods. Incorporating this learning and continuing existing best practice we have implemented a trial of new interventions to ease transition and provide ambitious personal and academic development over the past two years. The measurement of impact on student experience and outcomes was through metrics and qualitative feedback on satisfaction and successful transition and quantitatively using data on retention and progression, where we have seen withdrawal rates improved by 38% from the same period last year.

Recognising the diversity of our student community particular focus has been given to support the increasing number of students declaring mental health issues and those with an autistic spectrum disorder through the introduction of a "Quiet Induction". Students self-selected to participate and were given the opportunity to arrive ahead of the main Welcome Week for enrolment and registration with support services, provided with support in moving into accommodation and could have a friend or carer stay with them for a short period to aid transition.

Mature commuter students make-up over 40% of our total population and again have benefited from participation in pre-Welcome initiatives, jointly delivered by the University and Students' Union to include family friendly activities, a dedicated enrolment and registration day for commuting students, peer mentoring support and the establishment of support networks. The Mature Carers and Parents Network is now our second largest student-led society and has high level engagement in all of the University developments including designing of the Student Hub and new Catalyst Building as well as the introduction of a children's library.

Overall the satisfaction for our Welcome week survey was 92% satisfaction (Welcome Week Survey, 2018) with an improvement in retention of new and continuing students in the period from September to November 2018, our withdrawal rate dropping from 4.37% (2017) to 2.73% (2018) in the same period. Retention has improved for all students and including groups identifying as disabled, BAME, commuting, mature and those with multiple indices of deprivation.

Withdrawal Rates of Active Students by Protected Characteristics up to end of November of the Academic Year					
Academic Year	**BAME**	**Commuter**	**Mature**	**Disabled**	**IMD Deciles 1 & 2**
2017/18	6.0%	5.3%	5.5%	5.0%	5.9%
2018/19	3.6%	3.4%	3.6%	3.2%	2.6%
Difference	-2.4%	-1.9%	-1.9%	-1.8%	-3.3%

Step Up to HE

Over the last 3 years, Staffordshire has successfully supported 166 harder-to-reach learners onto undergraduate degrees after completing the specifically designed 'Step Up to HE' Level 3 course. The course is a short, intensive 10-week academic programme offered to students in order to develop their academic writing, research and study skills. Most importantly, the programme also ensures our learners are supported with the transition to HE, enabling them to successfully hit the ground running with their studies with confidence.

Confirming our commitment to work for the benefit of our local communities, Staffordshire has successfully created an impactful partnership with YMCA North Staffordshire, which has successfully

seen 6 of their residents' progress on to degrees with us. As a result, and through the opportunities created for some of the city's most disadvantaged learners, this partnership has inspired the kind generosity of the Bertarelli Foundation. As a method to support our YMCA leaners with the financial challenges of going to university, the Foundation has kindly donated 33 bursaries of £1,500 in order to support students who have applied to Staffordshire University through non-traditional entry routes including Step-Up to HE and Access to HE, both pathways which enable progress from the YMCA in to higher education.

As a result of the outstanding support we offer at Staffordshire to enable under-represented groups to enter HE, through our 'Step Up to HE' programme, we were positively acknowledged by MillionPlus as sector best practice in March 2018. Our case study can be found on page 10 and 32 of 'MillionPlus: The Association for Modern Universities #ForgottenLearners: building a system, that works for mature students' which can be accessed at http://www.millionplus.ac.uk/documents/Forgotten_learners_building_a_system_that_works_for_mature_students.pdf

DRIVER Project

The University has participated in a collaborative project funded by HEFCE Catalyst Fund, in partnership with Coventry University, called the Data Response Initiatives Vehicle for achieving Equity in Results (DRIVER). In this project the University worked collaboratively with our local further education provider to examine ways to improve transition of students who enter Staffordshire with BTEC qualifications. Our focus was on a personalised journey, with a renewed focus on personal tutoring and the development of learner analytic dashboards to inform the support required. These students are often highly represented by those from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as BAME, commuter, mature and those from low socio-economic backgrounds. This forms part of the interventions around our BAME attainment gap. We have reviewed the findings of this project and are currently using these to refresh our personal tutoring experience for both students and staff, with an analytics suite to support. The final report into impacts and finding of this project will be published in Spring 2019.

4.3 TEACHING QUALITY

As demonstrated by our metrics and continued improvements in NSS scores, the University values, and is committed to, high quality teaching.

- Top 10 nationally for student satisfaction for Teaching Quality (2017 & 2018)*
- Top 10 nationally for student satisfaction for Assessment and Feedback (2017 & 2018)*
- Above sector average for our student satisfaction in all NSS questions (2018)

**Source – Good University Guide 2019*

***Source – Guardian University League Tables 2019*

Six members of staff have been awarded a National Teaching Fellowship whilst employed by the University. It is expected that all teaching staff will hold a postgraduate teaching qualification or hold a fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). By September 2018, 66% of full time and 51% of all teaching staff met this requirement, and we still have more work to do. During 2016-17 greater emphasis was put on supporting part time staff and staff in partner colleges to achieve an HEA Fellowship.

All new staff are required to take a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher and Professional Education which provides a route to HEA fellowship. To recognise and reward teaching staff, the University has since 1999 rewarded excellence in teaching through Teaching Excellence Fellowships (TEFs). There are currently (at Jan 2019) 44 staff who are TEFs. These staff provide leadership in learning and teaching developments in their subject teams and act as consultants across the University. TEFs are appointed for two years and have time allocated to carry out specific learning and teaching related projects. These are evaluated and disseminated throughout the academic

community. In addition, since November 2018 they have also led discussions as part of our series of 'Learning Conversations'. These are weekly group discussions on a variety of teaching related topics open to all teaching staff. In 2018, staff from our School of Law, Policing and Forensics won an Advance HE (formerly HEA) Collaborative Award for Teaching Excellence for the establishment of the Staffordshire Forensic Partnership with Staffordshire Police.

The Academic Development Unit (ADU) working with Schools supports the development and delivery of learning and teaching accredited programmes. During 2017-18 the ADU delivered 46 CPD sessions and a total of 616 attendances were recorded. Each development session is mapped against the HEA UK Professional Standards Framework to ensure that CPD activities align with sector expectations.

On an annual basis the University runs a Learning and Teaching Conference on a key theme linked to the University Strategy, with contributions from external keynote speakers as well as from the University's own academic community. The most recent conferences have addressed the issues of differential attainment, employability and use of digital technology. Attendance and engagement provide an opportunity for a large percentage of academic staff to engage in staff development related to learning and teaching practice. In 2018 the theme was co-creation, whereby every session was jointly developed and delivered with students. In addition our January 2018 staff conference 'Putting the Student First' was focused on the student experience, featuring students as co-presenters.

To support teaching staff further, the University provides the Leading Academics and Academic Group Leaders Fora. Each of these has provided key academic staff with an opportunity to engage with topics including the BAME attainment gap; embedding digital technology in the classroom and transitions into higher education.

Since 2017 the University has delivered a development programme to course leaders, recognising the invaluable role they have in student success. With a focus on performance (of the course, student output metrics and staff) this course covered the course lifecycle, quality processes, marketing, student support, inclusive pedagogy, use of technology to enhance learning, and the use of data to measure performance and inform change. A total of 228 attendances were recorded for 2017-18

Our Academic Induction programme was refreshed in 2018 and includes a range of presentations and activities to highlight our approach to teaching and learning including equality, diversity and inclusion; student support; digital skills; connected communities; accessing data; student surveys; research and scholarly activity and ongoing academic development opportunities.

The Teach Well 1-day course is designed as a basic introduction to teaching for part-time members of staff, learning support specialists or PhD students who are involved in teaching but are not enrolled on the PgcHPE programme.

4.4 STAFF CULTURE AND VALUES

We are a values-based organisation, with staff being an integral part of our journey. The Best Companies Survey of 2016 showed our best ever employee engagement levels and our colleagues live our values in every contact they have with students.

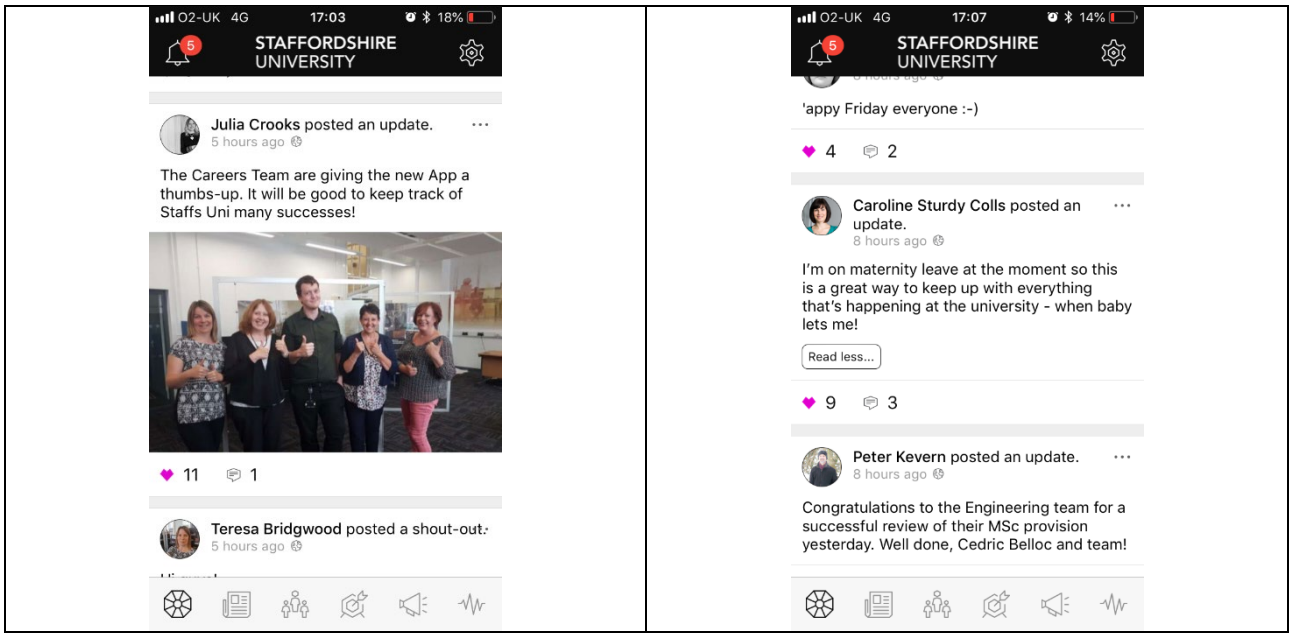
Our values are always to be: ambitious and inspirational; brilliant and friendly; curious and daring and proud to be Staffs

Our approach has been to ensure that these key messages are uncomplicated and easily translated into objectives and actions; our latest staff survey confirmed that 89% of respondents understood our goals and how it impacted on their work. These values form the basis of our annual staff award

categories and will be themes of 2019's 'Get Ahead' project, which will specifically develop student's employability skills and support progression.

We continue to move towards 50% of our academic staff having doctoral qualifications and 100% holding a HEA Fellowship, focusing on academic rigour and quality in our employment-focused approach. We have revitalised our staff training programme, focusing on improving the student experience, improving performance and encouraging robust challenge at every level of the organisation. Our Academic Induction programme has been relaunched and all new staff take part in our Onboarding programme to ensure a consistent approach.

We celebrate staff success on an annual basis and in June 2018 launched an internal social media platform to enhance our sense of community. The platform marks a shift of approach from 'top down' communications to true colleague engagement and its success has enabled us to move in to our second phase of strategic platform development earlier than expected, focusing on how staff contribute to KPIs and enhance the student journey in every aspect of their work.



4.5 STUDENT SUCCESS & EMPLOYABILTY

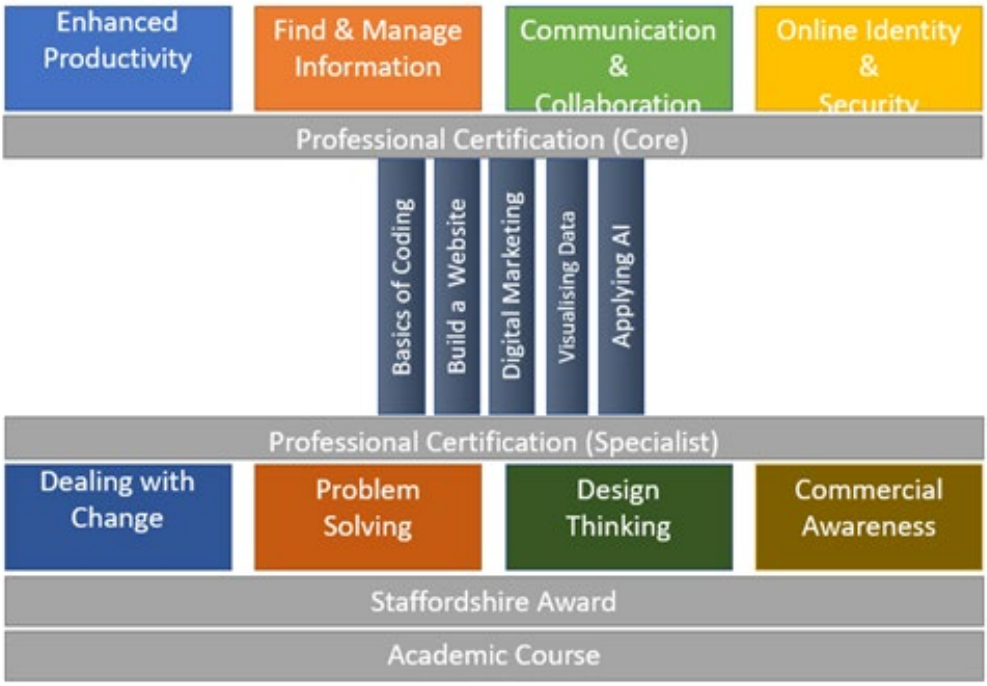
We have continued to prioritise and invest heavily in the personal and professional development of students and are proud that our efforts have translated into the significant improvements in our graduate prospects.

Our Graduate Prospects for full-time students have increased by 1.4% to 81.5% for 2016/17 graduates, compared to the HESA benchmark of 74.5%. Whilst our Employment Performance Indicator has reduced from 97.5% to 95.5%, we are still placed 1.3% above the HESA benchmark. Owing to their careers and the regional wage economy, our graduates do not earn as much as their contemporaries, but they do benefit from sustained employment, three and five years after graduation. In terms of sustained employment, we are ranked 20th and 35th nationally for female and male graduates respectively, in the latest LEO dataset for five years after graduation with graduates in Computer Sciences, Engineering, the Arts and Education performing very well. Our subject mix means that we prepare a significant proportion of our students for socially valuable but lower paid roles, for example, in the fields of health and education. We believe that these outcomes are good given the relatively small number of graduate-level jobs in the regional economy: -15% below the national average in Stoke-On-Trent and -10% across the geographical area of our Local Enterprise Partnership.

	% Residents with HE Qualifications	% Graduate level jobs - SOC 1-3	% SOC 8-9
Stoke-on-Trent	25	30	26
Staffordshire	33	43	19
Stoke on Trent and Staffordshire LEP	31	40	21
National	38	45	17

NOMIS Jan-Dec 2017, Office for National Statistics

Personal and professional development is now a core part in all our courses. Our Graduate Attributes are evidenced and written into the curriculum to support students to evidence and develop transferable skills. Building on this success we are developing the Staffordshire Award to ensure that all our students have the opportunity to develop a broader range of skills and experience irrespective of their courses. As the Connected University, at the core of the Award is the development of digital skills – the vertical blue blocks in the Award Framework below:



The achievements of students in relation to these digital pillars will be recognised through Microsoft Digital Badging. Microsoft is just one of the employers with whom we collaborate to support the development of our curriculum, placement opportunities and the Staffordshire Award.
Our relationships with NHS trusts have also created new employment opportunities. In response to difficulties experienced by one of our NHS Trusts (Shropshire and Telford Hospitals NHS Trust) and our reputation for teaching quality, students who perform well during practice learning placements are now given a golden ticket, which is a guaranteed offer of a graduate nursing role upon graduation from the University.

Two of the core annual events we organise to showcase the work, skills and experience of our graduates to employers are GradEx, the annual final-year student exhibition which has taken place for 20 years; and our Arts Degree Show. Its focus has been on promoting the work and skills of our computing, engineering and arts students, with those in the involved departments increasing their graduate prospects by between 8% and 45%. As a result of this success, this approach is being expanded to cover all disciplines in 2019.

4.6 LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

The University scores well in learning resources within the NSS, scoring 2% above the sector, and we continue to invest in a high quality learning environment, both physical and virtual. In our campus infrastructure ensuring that all projects focus on enhancing the student experience; the primary aim to improve our teaching facilities and 24/7 access to student support includes circa £2m invested in our Esports and computer gaming facilities in 2017 / 18, £1m in our Student Hub, £1.5m on the Digital Shed and the creation of a digital coach, and a further £80million allocated to the new Catalyst Building and other developments.

The Student Hub
The Student Hub has realised a long-standing ambition of the University to establish a vibrant, inviting, single accessible point of contact for any form of student-facing support. It delivers a coherent 'One Stop Shop'; integrating student facing support services into a single location. The facility allows students to receive information, help and guidance from staff located within the Hub, supported by more specialist expertise (e.g. counselling) in less public spaces, supplemented by self-serve digital resources and online materials. The new Student Services Hub based around a central enquiry point (help desk) and supplemented by flexible social learning spaces and a refurbished café. This brings services to the students in a streamlined, customer-focused way, rather than students being directed around multiple points on campus. It is also designed to deliver a "sticky" meeting and social learning space, where students want to stay and experience the vibrancy of the University campus.

The Student Hub workstream has also focused on the establishment of a fully-fledged 'Digital Hub', enabling any student to access an ever-increasing amount of online support and services from any personal device, from any location, and at any time, offering significantly enhanced choice and convenience to students. The Student Hub's approach to multi-channel support mean students can choose the method they are most comfortable with to access the support they need – live chat, face-to-face, self-service and more. The Hub services have been and continue to be developed in partnership with students who increasingly act as the co-producers and deliverers of the services we provide to our student community. Through membership of committees, attendance at open meetings and user groups our students have shaped the space, determined opening hours and access to facilities and continue to drive activity within the Hub.

We have already seen an increase in the volume and level of engagement with services delivered through the Hub. In four months there has been a 12% increase in face to face engagement with our Careers Service as a result of the Student Hub development, and a significant increase in general guidance, disabled student support and mental health contact.

	2017/18 (Oct-Dec)	**2018/19 (Oct-Dec)**	**% Dif +/-**
Disabled Student Support	268	501	+86%
Mental Health and Wellbeing	911	1087	+19%
Student Support and Guidance	626	780	+25%

"I #LoveStaffs because it changed my life. Without the love and support of @StaffsUnion and both academic and non-academic staff I wouldn't be considering doing a PhD. Thank you @StaffsUni for being part of my journey."
Bal Deol, student and disability rights campaigner. February 2018

Beacon: digital coach and support assistant.
During the first week of teaching in 2019 Staffordshire University will deploy the UK's first Digital Coach and Support Assistant for students using artificial intelligence, machine learning and chatbot technology. The intuitive Digital Coach will provide tailored information, guidance and support to

students, proactively engaging with them to ask questions about their university experience such as how they are feeling, how they would rate a lecture that just occurred and whether they are aware of support available to them.

Beacon is viewed as a core strategic channel to provide a 24/7 'always-on' relationship with students and can help identify any at-risk individuals who may feel unhappy or unsettled, and provide them with support and guidance, handing off to human-based support where appropriate.

Moving forward, Beacon will have enhanced capabilities to 'nudge' students to study, attend optional events and make better use of the library through a personalised approach tailored to individual needs.

Digital Shed
Our brand-new resource for 2019/20 will provide a series of co-located and interconnected technical spaces under the umbrella of smart technology. This is conceptualised to deliver advanced skills training, offer the use of cutting-edge equipment and access to advanced maker/bureau services covering a broad range of activities, all interlinked using advanced digital technologies, helping to embed digital into the curriculum of all courses, a key KPI.

The New Catalyst Building
Our drive to create a 24/7, vibrant and fulfilling student experience continues in the current project to create our £40m Catalyst Building, delivering the Apprenticeships & Digital Skills Hub, social facilities and open learning spaces. The world-class digital resources we will provide from September 2021, supporting students to learn anytime and anywhere, are being created with the full involvement of students, staff and employers and will see 6500 apprentices revolutionise the University and the local economy.

4.7 STUDENT VOICE
As demonstrated throughout this submission, student collaboration and co-creation is at the heart of our University ethos. We work closely with the Students' Union and with student representatives and ambassadors, to ensure the student voice is heard at every level.

Students are given the opportunity to formally respond to us through course evaluation and our annual survey, as well as through national undergraduate and postgraduate surveys. Personal tutoring provides a further channel of feedback, and we explicitly seek the engagement and voice of our students through social media. Students contribute to course design and staff learning sessions – for example speaking at our Staff Conference in 2019 – and our Vice Chancellor holds regular open sessions for students to share feedback with her directly. Students also have representation on all working groups and formal commitees. In the School of Health and Social Care, the 'Even Better if' feedback system has been introduced, leading to a range of estate improvements and the organisation of student-led social events.

An illustration of this positively impacting our students is when we received comments, through our student evaluation processes, from commuter students with family and work commitments that attendance was challenging with a 5 day a week timetable. The former arrangements could necessitate attendance at the University for a single class on a given day. We reviewed and amended our timetabling to offer students with these commitments a 3-day a week timetable for face-to-face learning and teaching sessions.

You said:
"We would value further opportunities to experience different work related and international sporting environments"

We did:
We expanded our links with employers to provide a greater number of work placement opportunities and provided a visit to international universities including Nippon Sport Science University in Tokyo.
-Sport and Exercise, 2018

5. CONTINUING TO CONNECT: 2030 STRATEGY

Staffordshire University through the delivery of our strategic plan has striven to be a great regional University connected to businesses, industry and to our local communities. We work with schools, colleges and partners to raise aspirations and improve progression in the region into Higher Education, connecting locally contributing to local social and economic development and to improve the local education standards of our community.

We are however aware that in today's fast moving and challenging climate we cannot stand still; technology is changing the face of not only our sector, but of all sectors and industry such that the jobs for which we are preparing our students do not yet exist, and the jobs that are routine and can be defined through an algorithm will be replaced and delivered through technology.

Our most successful disciplines in recent times are our niche areas, with a particular focus in fields for which we are known. The success of our newly launched Esports programme, with 128 students in the first cohort, demonstrates our position as a market. We will always need to be innovative and creative in this way to thrive in a crowded market and deliver for the students of the future.

Computing and the digital sphere are fields where we have been market leaders for over 50 years. From being one of the first five providers of computing 52 years ago, to be the first university in Europe to move our data and capability to the Cloud, we have been at the cutting edge for digital innovation. We see ourselves as a leading digital university and this will increasingly form the backbone of our 2030 strategy.

We do not believe that disciplines will remain as single unitary fields of study in the future because of the changes in the world of work resulting from technology. Indeed, new disciplines will be created around technology. All students will increasingly require interdisciplinary knowledge and experience and enhanced digital skills.

Given the pressures on funding and the availability of technology, more students will want to 'earn while they learn' and access to learning will require the ultimate flexibility with 'anytime, anyplace, anywhere'. Our courses will be flexible, inclusive and accessible to support this.

We will continue to build on our strong partnership network, in education and business, to extend our provision of relevant Staffordshire University awards locally, nationally and internationally. Connecting to international partners will always be a priority in order to give our students and staff an international experience and access to the best knowledge and exposure to different cultures from around the world. Nationally we connect with education providers, employers, influential stakeholders such as Government, professional statutory and regulatory bodies, and alumni to generate knowledge collectively and to ensure the very best opportunities and learning for our students.

As a University community we continue to connect with each other so that we work as a team across boundaries with a relentless focus on putting our students first.

In summary, we are confident that through this unique blend of activities, despite the often challenging socio-economic backdrop, we will continue to improve our academic offer and delivery of outstanding teaching to support the retention, continuation and successful outcomes of our students and ensure our offer is fit for the future.