PROVIDER CONTEXT, MISSION AND VALUES

1. The University of Wolverhampton is an anchor institution for (and of) the Black Country and wider West Midlands. We are proud to be the University of Opportunity, with priorities driven and influenced by our location and with a focus on education, skills, business growth and employment. We were founded in 1827 as a mechanics' institute to educate and train the local workforce. We continue this tradition today and make significant contributions to improving educational and economic outcomes in a region that has suffered disproportionately from industrial restructuring. Our founding principles still drive us; they are the inspiration for our strategy and underpin the curriculum offer.

2. The effectiveness of our strategic approach is evidenced by the positive trajectories in our metrics, and the sustained outstanding employment outcomes of our students. In a region with a very challenging employment environment, we provide opportunities for students from non-traditional routes to achieve outstanding and consistent employment outcomes. Our curriculum is educationally transformative for each student, and collectively of significant benefit to our location.

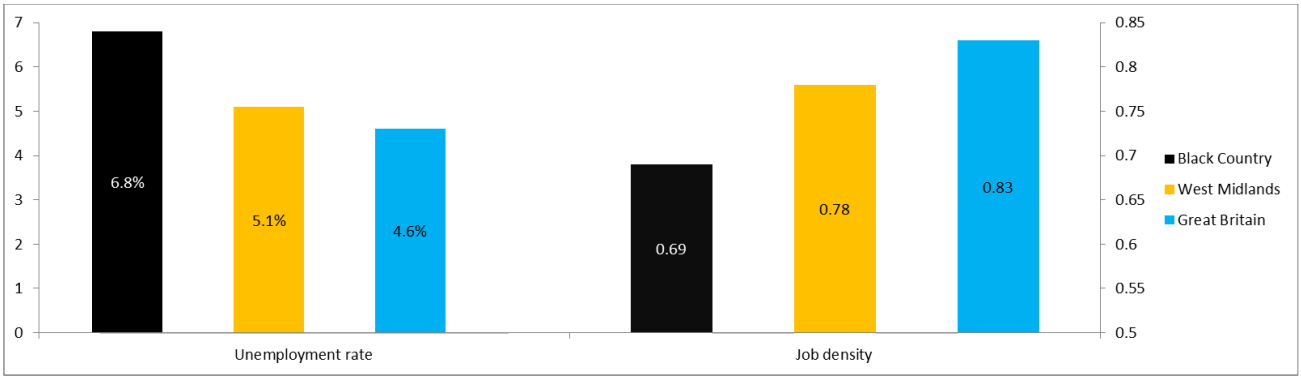
3. The University's mission is to 'maximise opportunity through generating knowledge, innovation and enterprise.' Our strategy deliberately aligns with the priorities set out by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) and our three local enterprise partnerships (LEPs). The strategic economic plans (SEPs), industrial strategy, and the businesses of our place are core to this intent. Our aim is to be a 'progressive and influential sector leader, championing diversity and creating economic impact and life chances for all'. To achieve this we have three pillars to our strategy:

- to put students first;
- to develop skills and knowledge for economic and social transformation;
- to have significant influence and impact.

4. To deliver this strategy, in 2015 we embarked on a transformational £250m investment programme entitled Our Vision, Your Opportunity (OVYO). The programme is directed at enhancing learning, teaching and the student experience; increasing the skill base in the region; and creating jobs to drive economic regeneration. This underlines our role as an anchor institution.

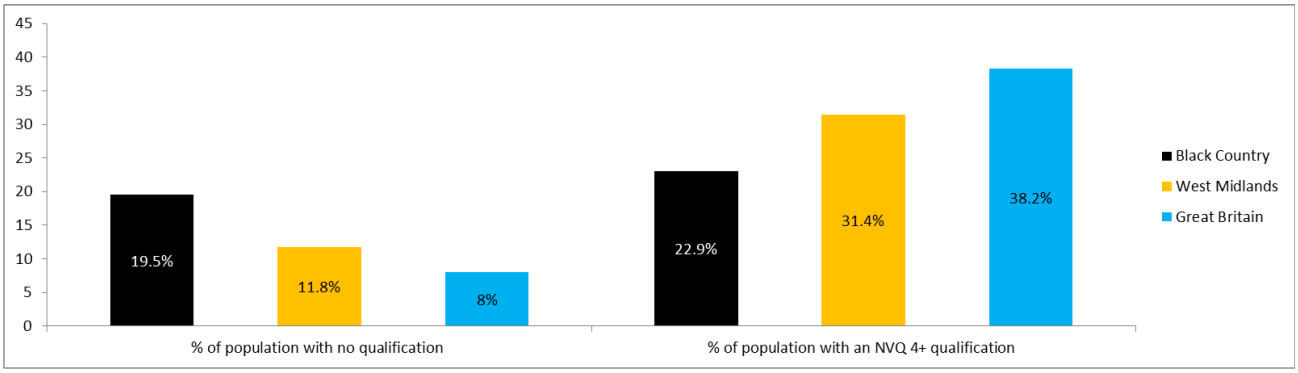
SUPPORTING THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION IN OUR REGION

5. We are intimately linked to our region, committed to and ambitious for its future. In comparison to other universities, more of our students are recruited from the region and remain here upon graduation. Consequently it is a strategic imperative for us to transform our region and improve the educational outcomes of those who live and study here. However, when viewed through the lens of employment compared to other LEPs, the Black Country is currently one of the most challenged in the country. It has the lowest proportion of total jobs relative to the working age population (having a density of 0.69, versus a national average of 0.83) and the second highest proportion of the population who are unemployed (6.8%, versus a national average of 4.6%).



6. In 2012 the University undertook a refocus exercise that was based on a commitment to our role in shaping and supporting our place. Rather than the traditional model of focussing on applicant demand, we reshaped our curriculum offer by shifting resource and numbers to meet the current

and future skills needs in the local economy, where our students gain employment. This resulted in the introduction of Chemistry, Physics, Chemical Engineering, Architecture, Automotive Engineering and significant expansion of Professions Allied to Medicine and the Built Environment. As part of the curriculum refocussing we have also promoted and supported local graduate entrepreneurship and employability skills development. Since 2012 the outcome has been a 67% increase in the number of STEM graduates per year (there are now over 1,000 p.a.), and our employment and further study metric has increased from 84% to 96% today. Our employment rate over the last three years has consistently been above benchmark and one of the best in the sector, despite a very challenging employment landscape in our region.



7. A further challenge for the Black Country is the low qualification base of the population, which is below regional and national averages (19.5% versus a national average of 8% with no qualification; 22.9% versus a national average of 38.2% with an NVQ 4+ qualification).

8. Improving social mobility through widening participation (WP) is at the heart of what we do. Our strategy commits us to raising aspiration and creating opportunity for all, by increasing the number of students entering and succeeding in higher education (HE) from under-represented groups. As part of the refocus in 2012 we started to address the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more affluent peers. An extensive schools improvement programme and sponsorship of 13 academy schools and 2 university technical colleges, aims to improve educational outcomes in the region. Additionally, we have established our reputation as a leader in the sector for WP and have increased participation in harder-to-reach communities. We have increased mature student participation by providing experiential and non-traditional entry qualification routes, and through targeted activities we have recruited more deaf/hard-of-hearing students than any other provider.

OUR STUDENTS

9. The University of Wolverhampton is proud of the role it plays in improving the life chances of the people in its region, and its record in supporting the least socially-mobile into HE. We have more than 21,000 students, the majority of whom study on undergraduate degrees on a full-time basis. We operate from three main campuses in Wolverhampton, Walsall and Telford, with additional centres in Stafford, Burton and Telford (Southwater).

10. The majority of our students (75%) are recruited from a 25-mile radius of the University and live at home and commute to study. The provider context and data maps do not represent the Black Country region and ignore the geographic spread of our campuses. Due to the way in which 'local' students are classified in these, the data does not accurately reflect the domicile of our students.

11. The Black Country is a highly diverse region, relative to the country as a whole, and therefore our student population is demographically and culturally diverse. The most recently available data (2015/16) identifies that we have significantly:

- higher proportions of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) students (39.7%) compared to the sector (16.1%);
- more mature students, with 56% of full-time undergraduates aged over 21 compared to the sector average of 50%, and 17% over 30 compared to a sector average of 10%;

- higher proportions of students from POLAR 1 and 2 quintiles (19% compared to 11% for the sector and our 16% benchmark), which places us in the top ten universities nationally for POLAR 1 and 2 recruitment.

These groups tend to be less geographically mobile and so do not seek employment outside of the region. The impact of this is considered later on in this submission.

12. In 2015/16 we commissioned independent qualitative and quantitative research (undertaken by McCann Erickson) to better understand our diverse student body. They concluded that, 'The one thing which unites our students is their diversity. Our students are not just students – they are mums, dads, husbands, employees and many other things in between.' This was further confirmed by the Students' Union (SU) in their Valuing Your View (VYV) survey of 2016/17 (responded to by 4,783 students), which highlighted the fact that our students lead complex lives. The survey identified that almost 1 in 4 of the respondents reported that they had caring responsibilities for one or more children, 60% of whom relied on childcare provision to study. Almost half (42%) still live with their parents, while 14% own their own home and are responsible for a mortgage.

13. A significant proportion (70%) of our students are the first to enter University from their family, which is far higher than the sector norm (50%). Their transition into HE is consequently more challenging than for those from a family with a background in HE, and their expectations are skewed by the absence of reference points. Although the same may be true for small proportions of students at other universities, these characteristics are very common within our student body.

14. Much research has been undertaken to identify the barriers to entry and success for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These impact students' experience of university, continuation, degree outcomes as well as employment prospects. As explored above, students at Wolverhampton typically have multiple dimensions of disadvantage, more so than their contemporaries in other universities. Dealing with just one factor may be difficult (e.g. caring responsibilities, part-time work or economic disadvantage), but when combined they pose even greater challenges to continuation and employment outcomes. However this also impacts student satisfaction. The 2017 *Everyone In* report by Unite Students found that students with multiple factors of disadvantage were more negative about their HE experience than others. Although metrics are benchmarked within the TEF methodology, what is not reflected is the multiplier effect that multiple dimensions of deprivation produce, which impacts our students. Our students face and overcome challenges to succeed in study and employment. Our mission is to support a diverse student body and we are proud of the role we play in their success.

15. The lives of our students directly affect the way in which they engage with their course. Indeed our full-time students are closer in profile and motivation for study to a typical part-time student body, meaning that their work and personal commitments impact on the way they interact with their studies. This has informed the way we have developed our 'students first' strategy to ensure we meet the individual and diverse needs of our students.

STUDENTS FIRST

16. The unique nature of our student body and regional context drive our strategy. Our 'students first' strategic pillar is underpinned by three further interdependent and inclusive strategies:

- the Learning and Teaching Strategy
- the Student Experience (The Wolverhampton Offer) Strategy
- the Employability and Enterprise Strategy

17. Our strategy and decision making are informed by our students through the student voice. We have a long track record of working collaboratively with our students, and elicit student input and feedback into all decision making. We have an effective partnership with students and the SU. There are student members on all governance and corporate management committees to ensure their views are represented. In 2015 our successful Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Higher Education Review (HER) commented that 'the University works in close partnership with the SU and this has been instrumental in initiating institution-wide improvements that are either led or

contributed to by students.' This is corroborated by the latest National Student Survey (NSS) data which shows that we are above the sector for 'student voice'. Students were represented on the working group which developed this submission and wider feedback and support was gained from student representatives throughout.

18. Each of our four faculties has responsibility for ensuring the delivery of University strategy in the context of their subject and professional base. The academic provision of each faculty is underpinned by externally-verified robust quality assurance processes. The QAA HER commended us for our enhancement of student learning opportunities and, again, in the latest NSS data we perform above the sector for this area. Our academic standards are assured by rigorous external examination processes and professional statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) scrutiny. Unlike other institutions, our 2017 HEFCE Annual Provider Review came without conditions and confirmed that we fully meet the requirements for quality and standards, and that 'the student academic experience is of high quality', and we have 'demonstrated continuous improvement' in relation to student outcomes.

TEACHING QUALITY

19. Our Learning and Teaching Strategy aims to ensure that students' full learning potential is achieved 'through empowerment and inspiration' and that 'teaching excellence is recognised and rewarded.' The founding principle of the strategy is that our learning and teaching is inclusive and flexible, to meet the needs of a diverse student community. In order to ensure the delivery of the strategy the University has made significant investment into enhancing teaching and learning over the last five years, examples of which are given later. This will continue into the future as a key element of the £250m OVYO investment programme.

20. Our NSS data shows improved satisfaction levels of students who have benefitted from the strategic initiatives and investments into learning and teaching (described below). In order to co-ordinate the delivery of the strategy across the University, the College of Learning and Teaching (CoLT) was created in 2015. Funded by an initial investment of £3m, CoLT promotes and drives excellence in learning and teaching through applied research and the development, dissemination and evaluation of enhanced and innovative pedagogic practices. This central unit coordinates a network of faculty-based staff to ensure the consistent delivery of cross-university strategic initiatives at the subject level and facilitates the recognition and dissemination of excellent practice. This reflects our institutional culture which values teaching. The Higher Education Academy (HEA) identified this model of learning and teaching enhancement as 'a very positive development to enhance the quality of the student learning experience.'

21. As a result of our strategic investment in learning and teaching, student satisfaction at the University has risen at twice the rate of the sector over the lifetime of the NSS. The majority of our NSS metrics are now within benchmark despite, as identified above, the fact that students with multiple dimensions of disadvantage are less likely to respond positively to student satisfaction surveys. The 'teaching on my course' metric has steadily increased year on year and is now within benchmark, as is our core metric for 'assessment and feedback'. Free text comments from the NSS continue to confirm the transformational impact of studying at Wolverhampton. Graduates have commented that 'the help provided was exceptional' and that they 'can go into the wider world of work and be confident.' Others recognise that 'the University has always strived for excellence and really pushes all students to work at a high standard.'

22. Our assessment and feedback NSS scores, which are within benchmark, do have negative splits for certain student groups.

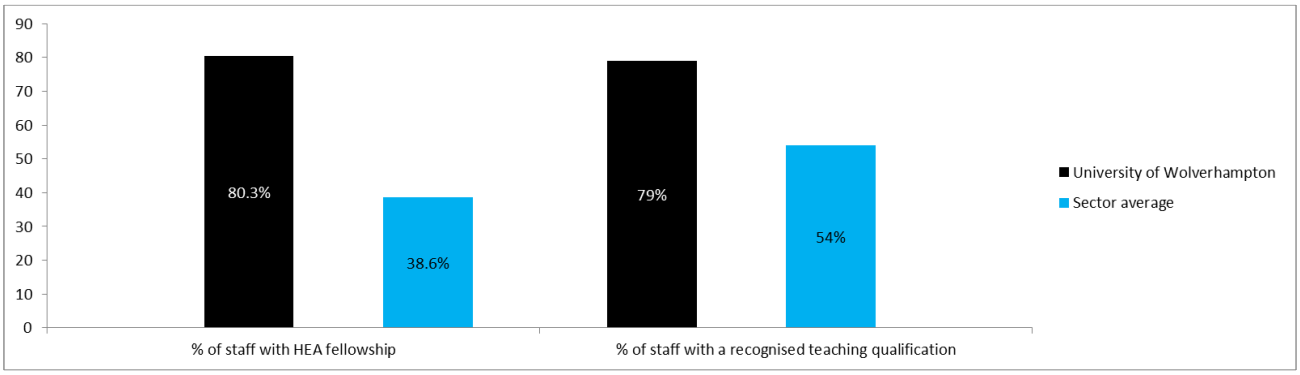
- Through continuous monitoring of Business and Law degrees, we identified student concerns with assessment which were reflected in NSS results. Of our entire male BAME student population, 17% study these courses and therefore their responses have a disproportionate effect on the split metrics in question. These assessment issues were addressed during periodic review and revalidation in 2016/17.
- In 2014/15 anonymous marking was introduced on nursing courses and the initial feedback to the way this practice was introduced was negative. Our nursing courses have a high

proportion of mature students, so once again this impacted the split metrics. The marking issues were resolved following further student consultation and improved guidelines.

Excellence in teaching practice

23. A major element of our Learning and Teaching Strategy is to ensure that all academic staff are appropriately qualified to teach and remain in good standing to ensure a positive student learning experience. All new academic staff who do not possess a recognised teaching qualification (or have professional recognition as defined by the Higher Education Statistics Agency) are required to complete a Postgraduate Certificate (PGC) in Higher Education and Professional Practice as a condition of probation. On successful completion of the PGC staff achievement is recognised through an increment on their pay scale. The PGC is also recognised by the HEA and leads to HEA fellowship. The University has a HEA accredited continuous professional development (CPD) scheme which also leads to HEA fellowship. During accreditation the HEA recognised that we provide 'a wide variety of opportunities to engage with professional development' and that we emphasise the need for 'staff to remain in good standing.' They also noted that there is 'a clear institutional commitment to supporting staff to engage with professional development.' The University has also encouraged staff to remain in good standing and move onto HEA senior fellowship, to the extent that we now have 130 senior fellows plus six principal fellows.

24. We outperform the sector in terms of the proportion of HEA fellows and are in the top 15 universities nationally for the proportion of staff with teaching qualifications. This has been achieved by ensuring that our staff maintain, develop and enhance their own professional practice. All academic staff engage with appraisal, peer observation and pedagogic development. This approach is embedded in our strategy which aims to 'develop subject and professional communities of practice.' In addition we deliver annual institutional learning and teaching conferences, workshops, seminars and training. Faculty-based equivalents enable local (subject) priorities to be addressed. The QAA HER identified the University's 'embedded culture of enhancement, which fosters the creation of staff networks to promote the exchange and dissemination of effective practice' as good practice.



Enhancing learning, teaching and assessment effectiveness

25. The University has a reputation for pedagogic research, aligned to the needs of our students. We were a founding partner of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation 'WhatWorks?' programme, which focused on interventions and research into issues relating to student outcomes (retention, success, belonging and engagement). The subsequent programme, 'WhatWorks at Wolves?', resulted in good assessment practice guidelines which have been disseminated and implemented and are responsible for our improved assessment and feedback NSS scores. The University was also part of the HEA Vice-Chancellor's Strategic Excellence Initiative (2015), which commissioned and delivered projects focused on issues including BAME attainment to continue our extensive work in this area. Our reputation in this area has led to our inclusion in two further HEFCE Catalyst projects on 'addressing barriers to student success' which will reduce attainment differentials.

26. As part of our commitment and support for pedagogic research we award £50,000 annually to learning and teaching projects. Staff bid to deliver commissioned projects that address pedagogic challenges linked to our strategic priorities (e.g. inclusive curricula, effective learning spaces or student transitions), or to develop and evaluate staff learning and teaching innovations. The SU

were active in evaluating bids to ensure they addressed issues important to students. Students are also able to bid alongside their tutors in order to undertake collaborative pedagogic research; for example a student-led project is developing an online student-life resource to support level 3 and 4 students.

Recognising and rewarding excellence in learning and teaching

27. We celebrate learning and teaching excellence through award schemes. There are two distinct and separate annual awards. The SU Awards are student-led with categories and winners determined by students. The Vice-Chancellor's Awards are voted for by staff. These schemes recognise and celebrate inspirational lecturers, excellence in teaching practice, outstanding student support and personal tutoring. They also provide an opportunity to identify good practice for wider dissemination in order to improve the student experience. To share effective practice, winners of the learning and teaching-related awards contribute to the aforementioned institutional training and dissemination events.

28. Learning and teaching has parity of esteem with research. Staff are promoted on the basis of learning and teaching. Currently we have five principal lecturers, one reader, and five professors of learning and teaching. We also have six staff who are national teaching fellows (NTFs). These staff play a leading role in the development and implementation of our learning and teaching strategy. NTFs have been responsible for a range of strategic learning and teaching initiatives, including the graduate teaching assistant (GTA) scheme, the PGC, and the HEA accredited CPD scheme, mentioned above. Through these initiatives, their impact on the University and its students is pervasive, as discussed elsewhere in this document.

Connected curricula

29. Our development of effective curricula is underpinned by extensive student feedback and verified by external academic advisors. As part of our strategy to achieve outstanding employment outcomes for our students, we ensure vocational relevance of curricula and gain PSRB recognition where appropriate. We invest in PSRB engagement to stretch our students and to further validate the professional practice focus of our curricula. We have now successfully achieved PSRB accreditation for more than 200 courses across the University. Almost 7,000 students now study on PSRB recognised courses, compared to just over 4,000 in 2014/15. Students gain full or partial professional accreditation and/or joint certification and recognition from these arrangements. Recognition has further benefits: it ensures that our curriculum is up-to-date, our students benefit from regular engagement with their PSRB and professional communities during their studies, and students enhance their CVs through the recognition they receive. This has contributed to the outstanding employment outcomes of our students and ensures that we consistently provide students with the skills and understanding that are highly valued by employers.

30. To increase student employability we ensure employers are extensively and consistently engaged in the review and design of all our courses. This ensures curricula are contemporary, business-focused and relevant, enabling students to graduate with the skills and knowledge the workplace needs. Each faculty has business advisory boards to ensure academic developments are informed by business and the professions so that graduates meet the needs of employers for today and the future. The boards provide feedback and guidance on the suitability of curriculum and new course design. For example, as noted by the Chartered Society of Forensic Sciences, the University 'provides currency to the curriculum and enhances the specialist networks which benefit both teaching and research.'

Ensuring rigour and stretch

31. The outcomes our students achieve are the result of high levels of stretch in the curriculum and a rigorous assessment regime that ensures all students are significantly challenged. These are supported by our improvements to learning and teaching practice through our strategy and staff development. The NSS provides a barometer of student perceptions of this, and in the most recent survey we perform above the sector average for 'my course has challenged me to achieve my best work'. This is corroborated by data from the most recent module evaluations where over 90% of respondents (~2,200 responses) confirm the module to be 'challenging and engaging'. PSRB accreditations and external examiners processes ensure standards are comparable with the

sector, QAA benchmarks are met, and awards map to the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications.

32. The University prides itself on the extent to which research informs the curriculum. Students benefit from the world-leading research which was identified in each of our units of assessment in REF2014. Validation and faculty performance reviews ensure that teaching is research-informed and that students are stretched and challenged. All research-active staff contribute to teaching, and modules and courses are developed aligned to our research. All degree courses include an independent study (dissertation) capstone module which allows students to pursue an area of particular academic interest and demonstrate the research and independent learning skills developed. Students are also able to engage with research centres. For example, Biomedical Science students have conducted projects with the Neuro-oncology and Healthcare Science research centres; in Performing Arts, students and staff explore gender and sexuality in performance as part of their collaborative LGBT research interest group; and in Sports Psychology students contribute to funded research within the Research Centre for Sport and Exercise Performance. Independent learning is a requirement of all courses, and validation and periodic review processes assure this is assessed appropriately for the subject/discipline. Over the TEF period we have seen a 2% improvement in response to the NSS question 'the course is intellectually stimulating', and over the last three years of our internal student survey (ISS) we have seen a 3% improvement in the equivalent question.

33. Our grade profile has remained stable for the past three academic years, confirming the rigour and stretch of our provision. Between 2014/15 and 2016/17 there has been a 3% improvement in good honours outcomes. This is attributed to the 3% increase in the proportion of graduates who entered with 300+ tariff points in the respective cohort. Differences observed between 2007/08 and now are a function of a 16% increase in 300+ tariff on entry, and the change from a 17-point alpha-numeric system to a percentage marking scheme used by the majority of the sector. The move to a percentage scheme was a student-led development instigated by the SU and the result of extensive consultation with students. Analysis undertaken showed that employers were unfamiliar with the alpha-numeric system, and it resulted in an atypical degree outcome profile. This change brought our degree profile in line with that of the sector. Since making this change grades have remained stable, which indicates the absence of grade inflation.

34. Our students' performance demonstrates their high levels of engagement and commitment to study and learning and is a function of our 'closely aligned strategies and initiatives to raise aspirations and achievement', which was identified as good practice by the QAA in our 2015 HER.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

35. The University has a well-established student experience strategy, known as The Wolverhampton Offer. The strategy aims to deliver an experience that provides 'transformative opportunities, personalised support and vocational relevance' in order to promote social mobility and enhance the individual life chances within the communities in which we operate. In doing this we seek to unlock the talent and abilities within all individual students to enable them to realise their full potential. The Wolverhampton Offer reflects the student lifecycle and supports the personal journey of each student from pre-entry to post-graduation by providing a support framework and learning environment that focuses on widening success across our diverse student population.

36. Continuation has been within benchmark over the TEF3 period. This is an indication of the effectiveness of our strategic approach to student support and retention. The majority of students who leave their course do not do so through choice or dissatisfaction, they do so due to circumstances beyond their control. Our analysis of withdrawal requests from students during 2016/17 confirms that personal circumstances, such as difficulties with childcare, health, and financial concerns, were the primary reasons for deciding to withdraw (60%). These reasons are indicative of students' complex lives and multiple indicators of disadvantage. Less than 10% choose to withdraw to pursue studies elsewhere, due to the above and their lack of geographic mobility. Where financial concerns are less of an issue (that is, for our part-time students who are

frequently in employment) our effective student support and retention strategies have resulted in consistent performance significantly above benchmark.

Financial support and advice for applicants and students

37. The University provides targeted financial support to assist students in a number of ways. While within benchmark for continuation, our split metric for mature students is negatively flagged. The SU VYV survey confirmed our concerns that many of our mature students have caring responsibilities and have to contribute to family finances. Therefore when the higher fees regime was introduced we identified a 90% increase in withdrawals from mature students, citing financial concerns as their reason. To address this and ensure students are equipped to manage potential financial pressures, the SU, in collaboration with the University, introduced a series of finance and budgeting sessions for students prior to entry. These focus on mature students in particular. Additionally, the University's Matrix accredited advice service provides personal financial guidance to our applicants and students. These initiatives have helped ensure that students, and particularly mature students, are better informed about finance and the costs of studying at University. This reduced the number of students withdrawing for financial reasons by 25%.

38. Financial concerns were identified as preventing some students from attending lectures, which resulted in them falling behind in their studies. Consequently, in 2014/15 the University introduced an annual £1.2m travel bursary fund for first year undergraduate students to ensure students were able to travel to classes. In 2016/17 over 3,000 students benefitted from travel bursaries to fund public transport access for all students. An evaluation of the scheme was universally positive and comments such as 'this has made all of the difference for me' and 'this makes it a lot easier for me to get to University' were typical. Additionally, when the Access to Learning fund was removed we created a hardship fund of equivalent value to support students in temporary difficulty. In 2014/15 £377,000 was awarded to students in hardship. In 2016/17 this amount rose to £539,000. This increase was, in part, a reflection of the severe financial difficulties faced by our students. However the fund (and other financial support) has contributed to an improvement in student continuation in 2015/16 (year 3 of our TEF metric).

Student transitions

39. A range of initiatives to support student transition and retention that form part of The Wolverhampton Offer have resulted in continuation being within benchmark over the TEF period. This has been achieved through a coordinated approach to the way students are engaged in pre-entry activities, diagnostic testing and extended induction to support transition, and a network of personalised support. We have also invested in a number of initiatives to improve retention, such as the HEA National Student Retention Project and our GTA scheme (discussed later).

40. Given the majority of our students are first in family to attend university, pre-entry preparation is particularly important in establishing expectations that support a successful transition to HE. Online and face-to-face activities were first developed under the banner 'Road to Success' to remedy particular concerns with the retention amongst trainee nurses. This resulted in a 15 percentage point improvement in retention between 2008 and 2016, such that attrition rates on our nursing courses are now 6% compared to the regional average of 11%. The 'Road to Success' programme has been disseminated and is being further developed and implemented across the University. For instance, the programme has resulted in special on-campus events for disabled and mature students to address the particular issues they face when commencing study and students now engage in online pre-entry activities, relevant to their circumstances and subject, to aid their transition to HE.

41. The School of Sciences identified issues with student withdrawal and consequently developed individual learner profiles (ILP) and diagnostic activities to ensure personalised support during the early stages of study. The ILP helps students identify their confidence on a range of study skills as well as their preparedness for HE. Students share and discuss this with their personal tutor. The evaluation of the pilot found student withdrawals during the first month of study were reduced by 80% (from 35 to 7 the following year). The use of ILPs has been widened to all students and supplemented by further diagnostics. For instance, maths diagnostics has been adopted in Science where such skill sets are especially important, with over 80% of students engaging. This

has proved useful in establishing personal tutor/tutee relationships and directing students to appropriate sources of support.

Student retention and academic support

42. A fundamental restructure from eight schools to four faculties was completed in 2015. This far-reaching reorganisation into faculty structures disrupted students' sense of belonging, as academic staff responsibilities were redefined. This had a negative impact on the NSS results for academic support during the TEF period. Those students part way through their studies at the height of the changes (that is, in 2015) were particularly affected. Such levels of change were anticipated to impact the NSS in the short term, but were justified by the long-term benefits the reorganisation has brought. The impact of the reorganisation was contained, and as a result of a number of strategic initiatives (described below) this metric will improve. ISS data over the last three years has shown 1.5–3 percentage point improvements in questions related to academic support, and we anticipate this change in student perception will be reflected in the NSS in 2017/18.

43. Our diagnostic work has informed revisions to our personal tutoring policy, which was developed in collaboration with the SU. All students are assigned a personal tutor to provide personal and pastoral support. When combined with diagnostic testing, this ensures our diverse students receive appropriate personalised support and guidance from the outset of their studies from the extensive support service provision we have available. For instance more students than ever are accessing and benefitting from the University's study skills support. As well as curriculum embedded study skills sessions, 3,000 students attended personalised learning skills provision in 2016/17. This will contribute to further improvement in continuation.

44. Mentoring is an important aspect of both our student support and employability strategies. Some mentoring schemes are University-wide; for example, any student can ask to be mentored by alumni on the alumni mentoring scheme – this scheme is directed at employability and networking. Other schemes are subject based. In Education, Sport and Psychology a peer mentoring scheme creates vertical learning groups and provides transition support. In Computing students have study buddies - final year students who support first and second year students with technical skills. Other disciplines have leveraged their business and professional links; for example, final year Business students are mentored by regional members of the Institute of Directors, and law students are mentored by lawyers from regional practices. These mentoring schemes have been very effective. An evaluation of the first five years of the Business School scheme found 65% of students engaging with the scheme had gone on to achieve first or 2:1 degree classifications compared to a cohort average of 46%. Increasing numbers of students are now engaging with mentoring, in line with their personal development needs, and the University works closely with the SU in promoting opportunities.

45. We ensure our extensive student support services effectively support our diverse student body. For instance, in 2016, 89**%** of students accessing counselling support indicated that counselling helped them stay at University (nationally this figure is 81%) and 88**%** indicated it helped them do better on their course (nationally this figure is 79%). The University also responds to changes in student needs. In 2014 the University worked with the SU to employ a mental health advisor due to growing concerns within the HE sector about student mental health. They have raised awareness and provided guidance, training and support for staff and students on mental health issues and the support of students in crisis. Training sessions have been attended by 883 staff and students to date. This strategic, sector-leading approach to our mental health provision resulted in the University winning the 2016 Times Higher Education Award for Outstanding Student Support, presenting this work to a parliamentary select committee, and working closely with Public Health England to inform national guidelines.

46. To meet the personalised needs of its diverse student body, in 2014 the University created an institution-wide GTA scheme. Led by one of our NTFs, the scheme provides full-time employment and further study opportunities to graduates considering a career in further education. The scheme employs 40 recent graduates on a two-year training programme. They complete the PGCE in Post-compulsory Education and gain teaching practice at our partner schools and colleges. Through this they help students with their transition to HE. At the University, acting as teaching assistants

focussed on levels 3 and 4 they are able to work one-to-one with students in order to personalise the support provided. The GTAs reflect the profile of our students, and having had recent experience they are seen as approachable and role models who act as a bridge between students and academic staff. A funded research project evaluated the scheme and identified the positive impact it has on the student experience and the positive contribution that GTAs make in facilitating student learning and support. Case studies of interventions undertaken by GTAs capture the impacts which they have had on individual students, while on modules on which they have worked we have evidenced that pass rates have consistently increased by over 2%.

Sector-leading physical learning resources and spaces

47. We are investing in our digital and physical resources to ensure students have leading edge, high-quality facilities that enhance learning and reflect the particular needs of our student body, as well as reflecting the types of professional environments they will meet in the workplace. This strategy is supported by the OVYO programme and in excess of £110m has been spent/committed to date.

48. An area where Wolverhampton has established a reputation is in the innovative development of effective learning and teaching facilities underpinned by research. A group, led by one of our NTFs, oversees a number of dedicated test environments where the impact of space on pedagogic practices is evaluated. One of these is sponsored by an educational furniture supplier, whose interests are in the impact of learning spaces on active learning. These test areas guide the development and improvement of our teaching spaces and teaching practices; for instance, this group's work informed the design of learning and teaching facilities in our new Business School building in 2014/15, following significant consultation with both staff and students. This resulted in innovative, flexible, collaborative and technology-enhanced teaching environments alongside extensive social learning spaces.

49. The Wolverhampton Offer ensures the development of effective spaces which support learning and teaching at subject level. Research and student feedback have shaped the £100m investment into new state-of-the-art teaching buildings. Examples include:

- The Performance Hub, home to the School of Performing Arts. This contains dance and drama studios, rehearsal facilities, professional standard recording studios, Mac Labs, music practice rooms and a theatre. It is equipped to meet the latest professional and industry standards and is one of only five 'All Steinway' schools in UK universities.
- The new STEM buildings have innovative teaching and research laboratory facilities. Science students have benefitted from the latest in-lab technology support software, which has been identified as a best-practice case study by the suppliers. New computer science laboratories have been designed for the safe use of innovative technologies, such as drones and robotics. Students also work in an open-plan, industry-typical environment for the purposes of programming these devices.
- Engineering spaces have been refurbished and developed to provide world-class industry-standard design, development and testing facilities including a wind tunnel and a 3D metallic printing facility. These facilities also support extra-curricular activities such as our student racing team, where students develop and service a racing car in the national Formula 3 championship and so apply their skills and knowledge in practice.
- Healthcare provision has benefited from skills labs equipped with a visualisation suite for an immersive learning experience, enabling students to develop skills for professional practice in an environment that simulates a range of scenarios such as road traffic accidents or emergency situations.

The buildings and resources within them provide students with learning spaces within which innovative pedagogy can thrive. Their design has been informed by and reflects the professional environments which students will progress to once in employment.

50. Our investment in physical resources extends to the provisions we make within our dedicated learning centres. Each campus has a learning centre which brings together extensive physical and digital library resources, study skills support and social learning spaces. In 2014/15, in response to student feedback we extended our opening to be 24/7 on all campuses. Post-implementation

student focus groups identified this as one of the most positive changes to their learning experience.

51. Our research into belongingness and attainment differentials shows the impact that learning spaces have on retention and attainment. This research has informed our campus strategy and investment programme. Over the last two years we have co-located cognate disciplines in order to foster staff and student communities through the creation of 'academic homes', particularly important given the commuter nature of our students. For our students a sense of belonging is firmly rooted in the quality of their learning relationships and is expressed as 'being part of the family'. Staff and their students are now co-located in terms of teaching and office space, and also share social spaces, increasing interaction and a sense of community. The new and refurbished buildings provide enhanced social learning opportunities to foster belongingness. Dwell time on campus has increased, confirmed by student surveys and proxy measures such as catering spend. These positive outcomes were achieved with the support and contribution of the SU who have led student consultations to ensure developments meet students' needs and expectations.

52. The 'WhatWorks?' data indicated that our students report a high sense of belonging. Physical spaces are a contributory factor, however students also reported that staff 'going the extra mile' enhanced their sense of belonging. It is this sense of belonging that our students believe provides them with the means to develop academic and personal resilience. Our success in fostering belongingness is evidenced by our 2017 NSS scores for 'learning community' which are above the sector average despite our commuter student base. We anticipate that these positive outcomes will translate into improved retention and attainment as predicted by our research in this area.

Digital transformation

53. The University has a long-established reputation for leading digital enhancements in the sector. We were among the first universities to introduce a virtual learning environment (VLE), we led the way in embedding blended learning in the curriculum, and our staff developed the portfolio software, PebblePad. Given their outside and personal commitments, digital accessibility to content, staff and resources is particularly important to our student body to enable them to access their learning at a time and place of their convenience. Consequently, alongside investments in physical spaces, over the last two years more than £10m has been allocated to support our digital campus strategy from our OVYO programme. A cross-University digital campus transformation programme, that works alongside our physical campus developments and learning and teaching strategy, commenced in 2015. The digital campus programme is focussed on enabling further innovations in learning, teaching and student support through the introduction of new technology and staff development on how best to employ that technology when teaching. The OVYO investment will ensure we provide an outstanding learning and teaching experience for our students and will put us at the forefront of digital developments in the sector. A number of student-facing projects have already been successfully delivered as part of this programme, each described below.

54. In 2016/17 CoLT led the implementation of a new VLE. The selection involved students and a 'pedagogy first' approach ensured that learning and teaching enhancements were prioritised. The new environment is intuitive, interactive and mobile. Alongside the new VLE, we have also invested in lecture capture technologies, which have been a great success. For example, when used in conjunction with flipped laboratory sessions in our new science laboratories (where tablets are embedded into student work benches), our recording-to-viewing ratio is one of the highest in the sector. We have also found lecture capture has improved engagement with assessment activities. Students can review the class subsequently to reinforce their learning or address any elements they were less confident about. Our NTFs in CoLT provide training in technology-supported pedagogy so that staff can maximise the opportunities afforded by the University's digital investments in their teaching and support of students.

55. In addition to pedagogy-based investments, the digital campus programme has also included projects focussed on accessible and flexible student support initiatives.

- In 2015/16 we introduced our web-based Apps Anywhere software hub, which enables students on campus to access software applications wherever and whenever they need them.

Students at Wolverhampton now enjoy access to one of the biggest software portfolios delivered in this way. To date there are over 200 software titles which have a direct impact on the ways in which students are able to learn. The portfolio also includes specialist accessibility software to ensure our support for learning remains inclusive.

- In order to improve students' access to module and personal tutors, the University has developed SAMS (the Student Appointment Management System). Originally developed by one of our schools, SAMS provides students with details of staff availability and enables them to book appointments online. The introduction of the system in 2014/15 saw a 5% improvement in associated NSS scores (Q11). Consequently, SAMS has now been rolled out to all faculties and we anticipate similar improvements in student satisfaction.
- In 2015/16 our new student portal (myWLV) was launched. It provides personalised, dynamic, and interactive content, and brings together all University systems into a one-stop shop. Students can find the information they need when they need it, such as their timetable, grades, PC availability, SAMS, the VLE, e-mail, library catalogue, etc. Over 80% of students who sent feedback following the launch of myWLV (n=300) agreed that it had enhanced their student experience. Comments included: 'it keeps me updated and aware … so many necessary features are accessible.'

56. Our strategic approach to the development of learning resources, and our responsiveness to the student voice, is reflected in NSS data for 'learning resources' which is above the sector.

STUDENT OUTCOMES AND LEARNING GAIN

57. The employment success of our students is a result of the strength of our Enterprise and Employability Strategy. This develops students' employability skills, provides students with work and professional practice experience, supports entrepreneurship and embeds business and professional practice in the curriculum. To ensure the consistent delivery of cross-university initiatives our central Careers, Enterprise and the Workplace (CEW) unit works in partnership with faculties. CEW provides career advice, enterprise support and an employment and internship service. They also coordinate with a business solutions team who source employment opportunities. Principal lecturers for employability and academic employability champions lead subject-related employability initiatives within the faculties. This results in students gaining qualifications which are valued and in-demand by employers. CEW was nominated for a National Undergraduate Employment Award for best careers service 2014/15, and over the lifetime of the current TEF metrics student satisfaction with the careers service improved by 5% (as measured by optional NSS questions).

58. Our research shows that our students' primary motivation for study is to improve their employment and career prospects on graduation. Therefore, employability is central to how the majority of our students evaluate their investment in HE. Our students achieve exceptional employment outcomes in a region which has one of the most challenging employment environments nationally (as described above). We are significantly and consistently higher than our benchmark. More than 96% of our 2014/15 and 2015/16 graduates entered employment or further study. This is further reinforced by the fact that our supplementary metric for sustained employment is also above benchmark. This is an extraordinary achievement given our regional context and is a result of 'the comprehensive range of strategic initiatives to enhance student employability' recognised as good practice by QAA during our HER.

59. The supplementary data for sustained employment has a negative flag for the split metric for students with a declared disability. This is explained by the fact that, in line with our mission as the University of Opportunity, we have a significant number of students with severe disabilities due to our targeted approach to recruiting harder to reach students. The data reflects a very small population of graduates from one academic year; indeed if 12 more students were identified as being in employment, this would not be flagged. To help improve the employment prospects of students with disabilities, the University has engaged in a number of projects including a bespoke programme of employability events and workshops for students with a disability. A further example was a 2015 initiative with Wolverhampton City Council, which resulted in the employment of 50 graduate students with a disability.

A strategic approach to employability

60. Business and professional practice permeates the curriculum to ensure students develop skills that are highly valued by employers. The manner in which this is delivered is determined by the subject. For example, some courses have live company consultancy projects for their final year independent study module, while others make extensive use of work-based assessments, guest speakers and practice-based mentors. As noted earlier, curricular are informed by business and professional practice; employers and professionals are consulted as part of the course design and approval process, and PSRB recognition and accreditation is pervasive across the University's provision. In these ways we ensure the professional relevance of curriculum which results in graduates from the University being employable on graduation. As a consequence of this approach, in the 2017 NSS we performed 3 percentage points above the sector for 'my course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt'.

61. To ensure students develop the skills necessary to secure employment, we have embedded a structured approach to their development within the curriculum. Following a successful pilot in the Business School in 2013, the University Enterprise and Employability Award scheme was extended to all courses where PSRB requirements permit. Achievement of the award recognises the student's development of employability skills and their ability to put these into practice in the workplace. To date 92% of undergraduate degrees have integrated the award and the target is for all to have it embedded by the end of 2017/18. Over 3,500 students achieved an award during the 2016/17 academic year.

62. A further development is the annual university-wide Career Development Week. The concept was piloted in the Institute of Sport in 2014. Following SU feedback, in 2016/17 it was embedded within the academic calendar for all students across the University, supported by a £250,000 investment. This week provides opportunities to further enhance employability skills, undertake extra-curricular activities to support the development of students' CVs, and gain additional work-related qualifications. Last year over 200 different events were held with over 5,000 participants. This week evaluated positively; two thirds of students identified that events were 'relevant to their future employment' and confirmed that it 'enhanced their skills and personal development.' Typical student comments included reference to the 'excellent opportunities to enhance knowledge, skills and CV,' which bought about 'the realisation about how important the need for enterprise and employability skills [are] in my industry.'

63. Research shows that student employment outcomes are improved through opportunities to gain work experience alongside academic study. The range of opportunities, and our active promoting of them, ensures all students can benefit from them irrespective of subject or personal circumstances. These opportunities are outlined here.

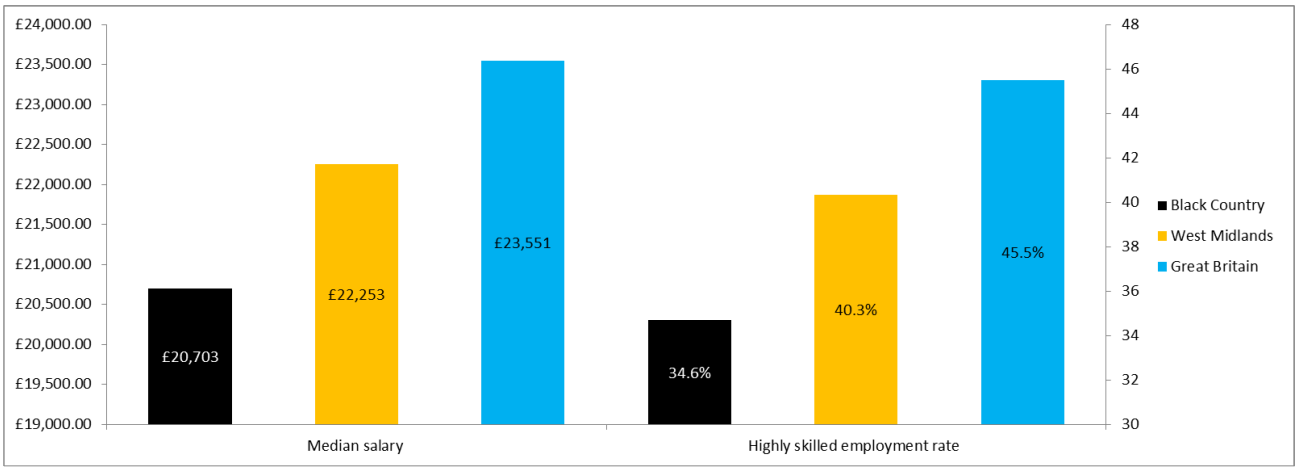
- Sandwich years or integrated professional placements are available in all full-time undergraduate courses. The University charges no fees for the sandwich year to encourage students to take advantage of placement opportunities.
- Volunteering opportunities which are managed by our Volunteer Central unit. The unit provides students with work opportunities in the voluntary sector, either as extra-curricular activities or credit-bearing work-based learning. Every year more than 2,000 students register for the scheme. In 2016/17 more than 74,000 hours of volunteering were completed by students. An example is Law students who receive training from the City Council to act as advocates to support vulnerable adults with benefits claims. Since 2014 students have been actively involved in over 200 appeals, resulting in £1.2m of additional benefits to claimants.
- Part-time work opportunities are promoted by The Workplace, the University's employment agency. Local employers can advertise appropriately paid, 'student friendly' work opportunities to students who wish to work part-time while they study. In 2016/17 9,521 posts were advertised.
- International internships are becoming increasingly popular. In 2016/17 almost 200 students undertook Erasmus placements and opportunities to work with our international partners.
- Extra-curricular project work is provided by The Challenge Academy. The Academy brings together regional small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and students to deliver real-life consultancy projects (for example, undertaking market analysis, web development or graphic

design). This initiative provides students with work experience and an opportunity to put skills and knowledge into practice. It also gives businesses the opportunity to talent spot, such that students may be offered further work experience during their course or a job on graduation as a result of this experience. Since the Academy opened in 2016 over 300 students have benefited from these opportunities.

We have increased student participation in work experience year-on-year. This has contributed to our outstanding employment outcomes and improving local economic conditions.

Highly skilled employment and further study

64. The Black Country has significantly fewer graduate level jobs and lower median salaries than the West Midlands and national averages. Despite this we have an upward trajectory for students entering highly skilled employment and further study which increased by 6.5 percentage points in the last year. However this, and the above median earnings supplementary metric, are each negatively flagged. Importantly, 80% of our graduates remain within the West Midlands, predominantly in the Black Country, for employment on graduation. This compares to 54% for all other West Midlands universities. The outcomes of Wolverhampton graduates must be considered within this context. Salary levels are approximately 1/3 less than the national average and we have nearly 1/3 less highly skilled employment opportunities. Due to their complex lives (e.g. caring responsibilities) our graduates often do not have the choice to move to more prosperous regions. The absence of region as a benchmarking factor for these metrics adversely and disproportionately affects our data.



A further factor which impacts the University's metrics is the definition of what constitutes highly skilled employment. The Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) doesn't accurately reflect the current labour market, and some graduates gaining relevant graduate employment are sometimes coded in non-professional roles due to definitions, rather than the skills required for the post. In 2015/16, 8.5% of our graduates who were not classified as being in highly skilled employment reported that their degree qualification was in fact a requirement of the role. Although they sit outside of the out-dated SOCs, our region would classify these roles as in-demand highly skilled graduate-level positions, which our students would not have achieved without their degree. If these graduates were counted as highly-skilled we would have been within benchmark for this metric.

65. Alongside improving employability, the University is increasing the proportion of graduates who go on to further study. In 2016/17 34% more students continued onto full-time postgraduate courses with us than in 2014/15. However it is more typical for our students to gain employment and then return to us a number of years later to undertake part-time postgraduate study. This is evidenced by the fact that our part-time postgraduate recruitment has grown, and 33% of this student body are former graduates. Therefore our students do enter postgraduate study, but the timing of this is not always captured in the TEF metrics.

66. As the majority of our students work locally, the University takes responsibility for shaping economic regeneration priorities to ensure more local graduate-level job opportunities are

available. In addition to addressing the structural problems of the region through partnering with our key regional stakeholders (e.g. LEPs and WMCA described previously), we also undertake the following activities which bring immediate benefits to our students to improve their graduate-level job opportunities.

- We work with businesses to encourage them to engage graduates where there has been no previous tradition. Our outward facing Business Solutions unit promotes our graduates to the regional SMEs with which they work.
- We are active in promoting knowledge transfer partnerships (KTPs) and knowledge exchange and enterprise networks (KEENs, a West Midlands funded equivalent to KTPs) in which we have placed over 200 graduates during the TEF period. In the November 2016 census we were in the top 10% of providers for the number of KTPs in the country.
- Our procurement policy requires new suppliers to work with our students (recent examples cover the range of large national companies through to local SME suppliers).

'It is essential that we have highly-skilled graduates that meet the local needs and requirements of business. The University of Wolverhampton achieves this and is a key partner in helping deliver the objectives of the Black Country LEP' (Stewart Towe, Chair of Black Country LEP).

Enterprise and entrepreneurship

67. Enterprise and entrepreneurship is a further strength of the University. It is important for our region and student body. SME creation is central to regenerating the local economy and is fundamental to the SEPs of our region. The limited number of graduate-level jobs in the Black Country 'pushes' some students into self-employment, while for others this was their motivation to study. However students declaring themselves as self-employed are rarely classified by the SOC as highly-skilled even though their businesses are invariably developed from the skills and knowledge gained from their qualifications. Self-employment and business start-ups are vitally important to the economic regeneration of the region, as well as harnessing the aspirations and entrepreneurial ambitions of our students. Given our success in supporting students into self-employment, this will disproportionately impact us in comparison to other providers on the highly-skilled employment metric.

68. Our Enterprise and Employability Strategy provides encouragement and support to students to start their own business. We provide business support, consultancy and mentoring to students wishing to start in business. We also provide incubator and grow-on space at our science and innovation parks and access to a £1/4m seed-corn fund which is allocated through the Green Shoots scheme. For many years the University has operated a 'SPEED Plus' scheme on behalf of West Midlands universities. Between 2014 and 2017, 136 graduate start-up companies were created, which generated 206 jobs. The next generation programme, Enterprise Action, has helped to support the creation of an additional 57 graduate start-ups over the last two years. Such outcomes are extraordinary for the sector and come about as a direct result of our strategic intent to support and invest in enterprise so that graduates have the best possible options in terms of graduate outcomes and realising their aspirations.

CONCLUSIONS

69. We are an anchor institution, embedded in the infrastructure of our region, leading the economic and social transformation of the Black Country. The exceptional and consistent employment outcomes achieved by students from all backgrounds, within the regional context, provides clear evidence of the effectiveness of our strategies and teaching and learning excellence. Our students graduate with the skills required by our region.

70. We transform the life chances of our students through the challenging educational experiences we provide. Our metrics evidence sustained improvements and positive trajectories in student satisfaction and student outcomes. These result from our strategic approach to learning and teaching and student support, and investment in the learning environment. The distance travelled by our students is outstanding.