TEF Provider Submission: University of York

1. Hallmarks of learning at York

> *"More than anything it is the enthusiasm and passion of staff that make York so special - everyone is willing to go the extra mile to provide guidance."* (Rebecca, Archaeology)

> *"The staff are amazing – they are enthusiastic about their subject area, and the support they provide is fantastic. There is always someone there if you need some help, or advice."* (Amy, Electronic Engineering)

Teaching of the highest standard; a challenging but supportive learning environment; student discovery - these are the hallmarks of a York education. Our students thrive on lively interaction with research-active academics across teaching formats, subjects, and approaches. Each year, in National Student Survey (NSS) open comments and in individual communications, students commend the expertise of their teachers, and celebrate the support they have received across the University community, giving excellent scores for the NSS dimensions *Teaching on My Course* and *Academic Support*.

Building on this heritage of engaged, productive learning and teaching, the past decade has seen a series of strategic initiatives, each designed to drive up graduate outcomes. Three important strategic pillars are: the *York Pedagogy*, a distinctive framework which reshapes the narrative and focus of each of our degree programmes; *York Strengths*, a programme which encourages students to focus on their individual strengths and long-term prospects from day one; and *Together York: the York Community Declaration*, which celebrates and enshrines our partnership with our students.

One year since we were awarded Silver, we re-enter institution-level TEF with improved metrics and compelling evidence of how we support, evaluate, and improve the student experience. We are confident that the excellence of our teaching, the value added by our degree programmes, and the achievements of our students are fully consistent with the criteria for a Gold award.

The York learning community: collegiate, research-intensive and inclusive

> *"York's college system is a brilliant way to make the transition from home … I feel I already have a second family."* (Amy, Social and Political Sciences)

> *"Inspiring lectures, the University has a great vibe and is in an amazing city. The college system is also fantastic as you feel like you can contact your college committee about anything."* (Stephanie, Mathematics)

We are a collegiate university with 13,000 undergraduate students, 4,000 postgraduates and 4,000 staff. A third of our academic staff, and 22% of our students, are from outside the UK, which contributed to our world ranking of 28th in the Times Higher Education 2017 league table of the most international universities.

Our College structure enables students from diverse cultures to learn to live independently within a supportive and inclusive community. Colleges provide numerous opportunities for students to develop teamwork, collaboration, leadership, organisation and communication skills.

We are research-intensive, with a large majority of academic staff contributing to both teaching and research. 35% of our research was rated world-leading and a further 48% internationally excellent in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF). Our rating of 10th out of 122 higher education institutions for research impact in the 2014 REF is testament to the diversity and strength of our social, policy, cultural and scientific influences. The embedding of research in our programmes of study highlights these influences; our teaching shows the power of research to shape both scholarly understanding and real-world practice.

Our university was founded on the principles of equality of access and social inclusion, anchored by the highest standards of academic achievement. We have been one of the most socially diverse universities in the UK since our inception. Our intake from state schools is around 80%. In spite of a changing and challenging admissions environment, we have maintained or increased our proportions of entrants from Low Participation Neighbourhoods and of BME entrants. A report by Reform in September 2017[1] ranked us second out of 29 high-tariff institutions for our track record in increasing access for disadvantaged students from 2011-12 to 2015-16.

Our staff and students are engaged in local, regional, and national initiatives to widen access and participation. These include Realising Opportunities, Schools and Colleges Network, Advancing Success, Excellence Hub, Higher York Partnership, and Green Apples. Since 2015 we have been a key partner with the Sutton Trust and other universities to open new Pathway programmes to inspire students from less advantaged backgrounds to pursue Medicine or STEM subjects at university.

Inspiring Achievement: *The York Pedagogy*

> *"It's excellent that York has this clear vision of what students will get from the programmes they undertake."* (External examiner comment, 2017)
>
> *"The York Pedagogy offers students clarity. Its principles, rooted in robust research, embed skills-based learning into holistic programme design. As such, in the classroom and in their own self-directed study, the Pedagogy empowers our students to equip themselves with versatile skillsets and the ability to apply them to new situations. I am hugely impressed by the University's commitment to the educational gain of its students and all the work this has entailed." (Julian Porch, York University Students' Union Academic Officer 2017-18)*

From 2014 onwards the York Pedagogy has been our university-wide approach to programme design, fulfilling our mission to support exceptional student engagement and achievement. It builds on research and best practice from around the world on the most effective ways to teach and to propel student learning[2].

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[1] Joining the elite: how top universities can enhance social mobility*, Reform Research Trust, September 2017. 'High-tariff' is defined as English universities which are either a member of the Russell Group or have entry tariffs higher than the lowest in the Russell Group.*

[2] *We draw particularly on research into the positive impact of programme coherence (a good summary is Gibbs'* Dimensions of Quality, 2010*), and learning psychology insights on designing student work (e.g. Brown, Roediger & McDaniel's summary of their research in* Make it Stick, 2014*).*

In each programme, the planning, delivery and assessment of learning is designed at every stage to enable students to progress towards a concise, ambitious and unique set of learning outcomes. The Pedagogy embraces disciplinary difference. Programme teams bring together tutors, students, employers and (where relevant) professional bodies, who work to design outcomes that capture the distinctive characteristics of the programme and the qualities that its graduates will carry with them into their career beyond the degree.

Over the past two years we have made a huge investment to shape every one of our programmes, both undergraduate and taught postgraduate, in line with our strategic pedagogic objectives. Both contact time and independent study are designed across modules, with a focus on delivering challenging and inspiring teaching, and on creating a distinctive journey that guides students to engage with learning opportunities, achieve their ambitions, embed lasting skills and abilities, and look to the future.

Alongside the York Pedagogy we have developed *York Strengths*, a sector-leading professional development programme for all students. We describe this in Section 5.

Our students are vital to the development and implementation of the York Pedagogy. As well as helping to construct stretching learning outcomes, students have engaged in departmental reviews of assessment using the TESTA[3] methodology, and have made influential contributions to University Teaching Committee programme re-approval panels. This close collaboration epitomises the strength of the partnership with our students.

Our partnership

> *"Students make a significant contribution to quality assurance and quality enhancement at the University. Opportunities for them to give their opinion are provided at all levels."* (QAA Institutional Review report, 2012)
>
> *"The strong support I received from the staff throughout my course, and their willingness to listen to student opinions, is what I believe makes York so excellent."* (Hannah, Sociology)

Students play a vital role in all our major decision-making committees including the University Teaching Committee, Senate and Council, and on the Student Life Committee, which is co-chaired by the University Registrar and Secretary and the President of the York University Students' Union (YUSU).

Through a representation system led by the Students' Union, students contribute actively and effectively to departmental Boards of Studies and other bodies. Every department also has an active Staff-Student Forum.

Between 2014-16, we asked the additional NSS questions on *Feedback from students*. In NSS 2016, on the availability of adequate opportunities to provide feedback, 19 out of 28 departments/combined subjects registered satisfaction results of at least 90%. Three, spanning all three Faculties, attained 100%. In the new NSS *Student Voice* question for 2017, we achieved 89.23% satisfaction for Q23 (*I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course*), ranking in the top 10% of providers.

Our partnership with students is now codified in *Together York: the York Community Declaration*. This is a proud statement of the values, expectations and aspirations of our

[3] *Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment; an established model in the sector.*

shared community. Under the three themes of scholarship, respect and purpose, it sets out concrete examples of mutual expectations. These embed the principles of the York Pedagogy: for example, 'scholarship' includes commitments that every student should "develop as an autonomous learner, devoting appropriate time to private study, and as a collaborative learner, engaging with staff and other students". In turn, students can expect "well-designed programmes of study, where the objectives and the methods of learning are clear and effective".

Together York supports a learning culture that stimulates independent, critical thinkers to explore their disciplines with passion and diligence, and creates a climate where every student feels valued and supported. It encapsulates and strengthens longstanding values, strategies and practices. The declaration was co-authored by students and staff including the Students' Union President and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching, Learning and Students, and was agreed by Senate.

Each year several projects to enhance the student experience run under the auspices of Together York. These projects are led collaboratively by student representatives and senior members of staff. An example in 2017-18 is to explore ways to enrich the experience of our international students, building on our existing good practice.

2. Sustaining excellence: the TEF metrics

We use many metrics to track our performance in teaching, learning and the student experience. In the TEF metrics we have two positive core flags (compared to none last year), a star, 41 positive split flags covering all three dimensions of quality (compared to 12 last year), and performance significantly above benchmark in five out of the six core metrics.

The TEF metrics for Teaching Quality are the NSS dimensions *The Teaching on My Course* and *Assessment and Feedback*. On the first, we have a core positive flag and 11 positive split flags. On the second we have a Z score of 2.0 (i.e. significantly above benchmark) and an increasing three year profile (-, +, ++) resulting from actions discussed in Section 3 below. Also in *Assessment and Feedback* we have five positive split flags but one negative split flag for disabled students. We have addressed the latter, also discussed in Section 3, and our performance as rated by disabled students has improved significantly over the three years.

The TEF metrics for Learning Environment are the NSS dimension *Academic Support* and the *Continuation* metric. On the first we have a core positive flag and 17 positive split flags. On the second we have no flags, core or split, but a star. In accordance with paragraph 7.17 of the TEF specification, we assume that a star with no negative split flags will be reckoned in the same way as a positive core flag. Our Z score of 2.9 is significantly above benchmark.

The TEF metrics for Student Outcomes and Learning Gain are the Destinations of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) dimensions *Employment or Further Study* and *Highly Skilled Employment or Further Study*. On the first, we are above benchmark and have one positive split flag (no negatives). On the second, we are 0.1 percentage point away from a positive core flag: our Z score is 3.7 so clearly significantly positive. We have five positive split flags including two double positive flags, and no negatives.

Our interpretation of paragraphs 7.24 and 7.25 of the TEF specification is that our performance on *Highly Skilled Employment or Further Study* may already have been uplifted to a core positive flag. In addition we invite consideration for uplift under paragraph 7.26 and the third bullet point of paragraph 7.27 because the double positive flag in the most recent

year evidences how our outcomes-driven initiatives are delivering real benefit to our students.

3. Teaching Quality

> *"York challenged me to think independently, experiment with new activities and have ambitions beyond what was comfortable and familiar. The friendly and open environment encourages you to look beyond the books and grapple with new experiences."* (Alex Urquhart, YUSU President 2017-18)

> *"I cannot commend the teaching staff highly enough; I have never had to wait for more than a day for an email response and when I have gone up to the Department I have always found someone to help me with any queries that I have. On top of this the teaching standard has been so good; the course progresses at a pace that challenges you at the same time as allowing you time to explore areas that interest you*." (Jessica, Philosophy)

Clear performance expectations for staff

Excellent teaching starts from in-depth knowledge, passionate commitment to the student experience, and a willingness to listen to and learn from students. In 2015, we captured these principles in a *Statement of Teaching Performance Expectations*. The Statement guides departments and teaching teams, provides a reference point for annual performance reviews of teaching staff, and shapes the design of centrally-provided professional development opportunities, alongside the sector-owned UK Professional Standards Framework.

Colleagues are required to be fully prepared for teaching, to engage with professional development, to demonstrate and nurture collegial behaviour, and to provide effective support, learning experiences and feedback to students.

Staff development

> *"At York you're not just taught by the people that wrote the book but encouraged to think with an independent mind."* (Joshua, Education)

Excellent teaching and exceptional support for student learning are rooted in engaging and challenging opportunities for staff development. Like our students, our staff benefit from excellent teaching and well-designed courses.

Our last QAA Institutional Review identified as good practice "the wide range of training and development opportunities at all levels, ranging from postgraduate research students to senior academic and support staff". We continue to develop this portfolio.

New academics study for the *Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice* (PGCAP), which is accredited by the Higher Education Academy at Fellowship level. Our programme encompasses teaching skills and engages participants with a wide range of educational research.

For more experienced staff, the *York Professional and Academic Development Scheme* (YPAD) is a CPD framework that is HEA-accredited to Principal Fellowship level. Feedback from participants has been excellent, with strong indications that the approach materially enhances their teaching: for example, "the programme has caused me to re-evaluate how I

work with others, to be more critical of departmental approaches to teaching, and to consider why and how I teach" (Dr Phil Lightfoot, Physics).

We embed the professional development of support staff in our *Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching and Support for Learning in Higher Education*. This is accredited by the HEA at Associate Fellowship level. Its delivery is integrated as much as possible with the PGCAP, symbolising our culture of staff in central teams working in partnership with academic colleagues.

Research students contribute to teaching and supporting student learning in academic departments and as tutors in central services such as the Maths Skills Centre and the Writing Centre. Most undertake the *York Learning and Teaching Award*, a 20-credit Masters-level programme which is HEA-accredited at Associate Fellowship level. This is supplemented by training specific to the role.

Recognising and rewarding excellent teaching

> *"What is great about York is that the teaching staff will push you to think in a critical way; to question everything and form your own opinions based on research."* (Katie, French and Linguistics)

We recognise and reward teaching excellence equally with research in the promotions system. This includes a promotion route to professor "for academic colleagues on Teaching-only contracts who have made an exceptional contribution to teaching at the highest level of excellence". We make no distinction in academic title between those who are on Research and Teaching, and Teaching-only contracts.

The Vice-Chancellor's Teaching Awards is our premier scheme for recognising outstanding teaching. The awards are rigorous, highly selective, and determined by a panel which includes previous winners and student representatives. Nominations are informed by departments' internal mechanisms for identifying excellence, such as student evaluations. The winners are presented at graduation ceremonies and are also required to disseminate their practice. We made seventeen awards in 2017, recognising excellence across all Faculties.

Our students are highly active in recognising excellent teachers. The York University Students' Union (YUSU) Excellence in Teaching and Supervision Awards scheme is in its fifth year. A panel of students assisted by a senior academic decides the awards, which celebrate individuals, teams and departments from across the University. Categories include awards for promoting employability and diversity. Engagement is University-wide: students nominated 294 staff in 2017, with 15 awards.

We also encourage colleagues to seek national recognition. Eight of our staff have won National Teaching Fellowships whilst at the University. This places us joint-twelfth in the sector in the number of awards per institution over the 17 years of the scheme to 2017. The expertise of these colleagues influences learning and teaching developments, including through membership of the University Teaching Committee and project groups.

Intellectual stimulation, stretch and rigour

> *"York is a research-intensive institution that inspires and facilitates independent critical thinking. When you combine these characteristics, magic happens."* (Julian Porch, YUSU Academic Officer 2017-18)

The NSS provides evidence of the rigour and stretch of our programmes. Agreement that *the course is intellectually stimulating* (Q4 to 2016, Q3 from 2017) has averaged 90% over the past three years.

The new NSS Q4 (*my course has challenged me to achieve my best wor*k) and *Learning Opportunities* dimension will help us to monitor the impact of the York Pedagogy. We analyse NSS results extensively, both centrally and in academic departments, and use them as a core element of enhancement planning.

The NSS *Organisation and Management* dimension is the nearest proxy in existing public metrics for programme coherence and consistent delivery, essential to the quality of teaching experienced by students. We do not have benchmark information that would allow comment on flag equivalence, but we do know that if this was a TEF dimension, we would receive a star, with our three-year average of 84.6% putting us in the top 10% of all institutions.

We analyse degree classifications every year, with a deep analysis every two years. The Standing Committee on Assessment, University Teaching Committee and Senate scrutinise the results, and triangulate them with other evidence such as the reports of external examiners. In the early 2010s, external examiners across several disciplines suggested that outstanding work was not being fully recognised because markers were reluctant to use the full mark scale. We were thus prompted to adopt marking-band criteria that enable outstanding assessments to attain outstanding marks. We are confident that this change enhanced equity between students in different subject areas, and equally that unwarranted grade inflation is not an issue at York. The supplementary TEF data show that the proportion of First-Class Honours awards has increased by 4 percentage points over the past ten years, and the proportion of Upper Seconds has increased by 3 percentage points. Having transitioned to criteria that encourage full-scale marking, there has been no further increase: the proportion of 'good' (First and Upper Second) awards has remained consistent over the past three years (79% in each year).

Supporting and evidencing achievement through assessment and feedback

Assessment and feedback, crucial to student learning, have traditionally been challenging for the sector in terms of student satisfaction. Our own past performance was disappointing, but we acted vigorously to achieve consistency across all subject areas in the clarity of assessment criteria and the provision of timely and effective feedback. Students contributed to these enhancements, helping to improve the clarity and accessibility of criteria. This work was also informed by evidence from internal student evaluations of programmes and modules, and by external survey evidence from the NSS. We invested in professional advisory support for academic staff on assessment and feedback design, and in the guidance for students on effective study skills.

The TEF metrics show that these actions have already had significant positive impact. The Z score exceeds the threshold for statistical significance and the split metrics show that we have converted a relative underperformance in 2015 (negative flag) into a positively flagged outcome in 2016, and a 'double positive' flag in 2017[4].

The sole negative split flag (among five positives, including three 'double positives') is for disabled students' perceptions of assessment and feedback. Students with a disability represented 14% of our NSS respondents in 2017. We have improved the effectiveness of

[4] *Our part-time UG population is small, and primarily centred in CPD provision, leaving us with no reportable metrics under the TEF criteria.*

the arrangements for disabled students undertaking assessments and have invested in additional Disability Adviser capacity to work closely with departments and enable students to reach their full potential. The positive impact of these ongoing measures is evidenced by the continuous improvement in the absolute level of satisfaction of our disabled students in the *Assessment and Feedback* dimension over the three component years: 63.5% in 2015, 69.0% in 2016 and 72.8% in 2017. The York Pedagogy is driving further enhancements for all students in the design of both formative and summative assessment.

Our *Guide to Assessment, Marking and Feedback* incorporates not only policy and regulatory provisions, but also guidance on good practice. The Guide was commended at our last QAA Institutional Review for linking assessment strategies to learning outcomes. We have continued to develop it, for example with more detailed advice on group work assessment and on acceptable levels of external proof-reading.

There is progress still to be made with assessment and feedback. Our overall score in the 2017 NSS was 76.17% satisfaction. We are determined to improve this figure substantially. Fifteen departments are currently working with their students, using the TESTA methodology, to analyse assessment and feedback from the student's perspective. Electronic submission and handling of assessed work, well-established in some departments, is being rolled-out across the remainder of the University.

4. Learning Environment

> *"The focus on small group learning and availability of tutor support helps you feel directly involved in academic culture."* (Charlie, English)

> *"The staff are really approachable and very supportive over any problems you might be dealing with, and the Maths Society provides a community of like-minded people for even more support while you're studying."* (Kim, Mathematics)

Research-enriched teaching

> *"It's a great feeling to know that you're being taught by academics who are at the cutting edge of research. The course has not only been interesting, it has changed my perspective on many issues*." (Melissa, Sociology)

> *We've been thoroughly impressed with the outcomes from the research informed problem-based learning model within the Law Faculty at York – the students that we meet on campus and interview for our placement schemes are universally solutions-focused and commercially aware.*" (Caroline Stevens, Resourcing Director, Squire Patton Boggs)

All of our students' work is enriched by York research. Our *Learning and Teaching Strategy* includes the commitment that teaching should "engage students in the joy of discovery and invention and expose them to research. It should include insights from our own contributions to our disciplines, and be broadly informed by current research".

Student engagement with research is embedded in programme design from the outset. It is evaluated in the approval process for new degrees and subsequently in periodic reviews. Both processes incorporate external academic peer review and student scrutiny. For many years, periodic review panels have included student members, and their input is characteristically perceptive, constructive and professional.

Through the York Pedagogy, we have further specified the benefits of learning in a research environment. Programme outcomes typically include a clear statement of graduates' abilities to undertake evaluation, research and reflective practice, and to communicate with both specialist and lay audiences.

The influence of research on the quality of student learning opportunities is cited regularly in the reports of PSRB accreditation reviews. Examples include commendations by the British Psychological Society (2016) that "students benefit from excellent, research-led teaching", and by BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT (2017) for "the University's excellent research and the Department's inclusion of research within teaching".

27 student academic societies directly address academic study areas with productive links to departments. These often provide mechanisms for research inside and outside the University to be shared with students.

Research into higher education shapes our programmes. Staff engage with current findings through the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PGCAP), referred to above, the Learning and Teaching Forum, our annual Learning and Teaching Conference, our institutional *Forum* magazine that disseminates best practice in action research, staff development workshops, and the input of colleagues in central services. Many of the last group are themselves actively involved in presenting at national and international conferences and in publishing work in educational journals.

In 2015 we launched a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL) Network which now has over 100 registered participants. Network activities include discussion workshops to explore topical and challenging material. Our internal SOTL Journal showcases our own educational innovation and research to the University community, including projects undertaken by PGCAP participants.

Learning resources

From our foundation in 1963, we have prioritised the support of teaching and learning in the design and specification of physical space. This principle has informed both major building projects and small-scale refurbishments.

A Learning Spaces Working Group with active student representation has strongly influenced the design of the most recent capital investments including our new centrally-located Spring Lane teaching building, completed in October 2016, and the Piazza Learning Centre, which opened in January 2018. Together these new buildings add two 350 seat lecture theatres and over 50 seminar rooms to our estate, along with high quality study and informal learning spaces.

Timetabling is designed by a team of specialists embedded in academic departments to ensure a deep understanding of programmes and modules. This delivers a good balance between effective use of space and the needs of each student for a balanced timetable. We publish the timetable for the entire academic year in June to give our students as much time as possible to organise their activities, and to support disabled students and those from non-traditional backgrounds.

Programmes with a relatively high proportion of students from under-represented groups have specific enablers in the timetable to facilitate commuting and childcare, and to allow part-time students to study whilst working. One outcome of the annual space audits is that students can book directly any spare capacity for their own personal or group use, which now happens around 200 times per day.

The Library is open 24/7, 362 days per year. Our NSS results for *Library resources* average 89.6% satisfaction from 2015-17. In our internal IT Services Survey, 92% of almost 2000 respondents rated the service as 'good' or 'very good' in 2015, rising to 93% of over 1560 respondents in 2017. Students particularly value the support for independent study and research, including the availability of quiet space and the accessibility of e-resources. The Information Services Directorate (including the Library and IT Services) and the Student and Academic Services Directorate (including student support, careers and employability guidance, and professional advisory support for academic staff) have received the government-backed Customer Service Excellence award.

Virtual resources are a core part of the student experience. Technology enhances both independent study and the interactivity of classroom-based learning: in 2016, 85% of respondents to an internal survey said that use of the Virtual Learning Environment complemented their class-based learning. Our *Technology Enhanced Learning Handbook* provides extensive guidance for staff on good practice and case study examples.

All of the main teaching rooms are equipped with lecture recording facilities. From September 2016 – August 2017, student download activity reached 181,000 hours of content. This level of viewing activity is the fourth highest out of over seventy universities in the UK cloud-hosted by our supplier. Students are supported by our research and guidance on how to engage effectively with lecture recordings.

Personalised support for learning

> *"As an international student I feel really well supported. My Department allocated me both a personal supervisor and an international supervisor, and we meet regularly."* (Chloe, Psychology)

> *"The staff were consistently supportive and always approachable, which fostered a strong working relationship between them and the student body. As part of a diverse and international community I found that there was a wealth of different experiences and perspectives that contributed much both in and out of the classroom."* (Andy, Politics)

The TEF metrics show that our students experience outstanding support which is inclusive and effectively tailored. We have a 'double positive' overall flag which includes a Z score of 7.8, combined with seven positive and ten 'double positive' split flags.

Our approach considers the entirety of the 'student journey' from pre-arrival to graduation. Departmental 'Preparing to Study' online materials have been established for many years, giving new students a greater appreciation of the nature of university study and exposure to programme materials before arriving in York.

All students must pass an online Academic Integrity Tutorial to progress to their second year. We use Turnitin for plagiarism detection, and students have the opportunity to attend workshops on the use of this software and to reinforce good practice. Engagement is very high, and growing: 1833 students participated in 2015, rising to 3148 in 2016 and 3787 in 2017. Most of these are first year students.

In 2015-16 we began rolling out a peer mentoring scheme through our colleges, in which first years receive guidance and support from more experienced students on aspects such as adjusting to university life and accessing campus resources.

Five academic departments are also currently piloting Peer Assisted Learning schemes with central support, to enhance student engagement with aspects of programmes and modules which are particularly challenging.

We embed personalised and responsive support in other ways, such as creating accessible learning resources for severely visually impaired students through scanning services in the Library. Our Centre for English Language Teaching runs courses on themes such as transcultural communication. These not only build language capability but also broader confidence to engage with academic study and with peers in classroom situations.

A Mature Student Buddying Scheme helps mature students settle into university life. We provide a monthly Carers Café for students with caring responsibilities to chat informally about their experiences, a dedicated contact for students who have spent time in care, and a buddying scheme for local and commuting students.

Our Writing Centre and Maths Skills Centre provide drop-in and bookable 1:1 advice with trained staff, to supplement the support which is embedded in modules. Engagement is high: drop-in and appointment visits to the Centres in 2016-17 totalled 1223 and 850 respectively. This supplementary support contributes to retention: we have several instances of students indicating that they would have dropped out from their programme had it not been for these services.

Continuation

We are proud of our excellent student continuation rate: 96.8% for full-time students in the core TEF metric, which receives a 'high absolute score' star in the TEF methodology. We exceed the Z-score threshold for a positive significance flag.

We analyse a range of evidence on an ongoing basis to understand patterns of student progression and outcomes. The most significant reason for non-continuation is academic failure to progress, so we are working to ensure that we have all appropriate routes to enable students to recover and redeem their performance. In 2017 the Senate agreed provisions to afford more opportunities for students who have failed their first year to repeat the year, without compromising academic standards.

Our internal surveys of engagement provide further evidence to help us to tailor support for student retention. Our Freshers' Survey in particular has helped us to understand more about the profile of new students who may be slow to develop an effective study routine in their first term, and are thus potentially 'at risk'. Actions arising from this evidence have included focused work in colleges, improved pre-arrival communications, and additional induction and networking support for mature students.

5. Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

> *"I secured a job with McLaren before graduation. I was asked to supply a portfolio of embedded systems work. It was drawn from projects completed during my degree and demonstrated the knowledge and skills I gained on the course."* (Phil, Computer Science)

We are deeply interested in the measurement of learning gain. In founding the York Pedagogy on recent research, we drew on studies that offered learning gain metrics. We are participants in LEGACY, the largest HEFCE-funded project on learning gain, and our York Experience and Freshers surveys draw on well-evidenced linkages between engagement

and learning gain. We recognise how much work is still needed in the sector on learning gain measurement, so in line with the chosen TEF metrics, this section focuses on the employment outcomes of our graduates.

A 2016 report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies[5], analysing graduate earnings in 2012-13, ranked York as one of the highest performing institutions: 8th out of 166 (female) and 8th out of 168 (male) for median annual earnings. It states that "one notable observation is the very strong performance of some northern universities, Liverpool, Newcastle and York, which have graduates that achieve highly competitive earnings even though their local labour markets have lower earnings than we see in the southern part of England".

We have a star under the TEF methodology for our part-time cohort, confirming the excellent achievements of these students in gaining highly-skilled employment or further study[6].

Our students with widening participation characteristics have above average engagement with employability programmes, and employment outcomes for students from Low Participation Neighbourhoods and from BME backgrounds are significantly above sector averages. Over the period 2014-16 we exceeded the average for all other institutions in positive destinations (full-time, home, first degree students) by 12.3% (BME), 8.3% (SEC groups 4-7) and 8.3% (Low Participation Neighbourhoods).

The achievement of excellent graduate outcomes requires more than excellent teaching and opportunities for learning: it also needs direct support for employability. Our outstanding portfolio of opportunities enables every student to experience employment during their programme (following section), and to analyse their personal strengths and structure their preparations for work after graduation (discussed later).

Opportunities for work experience

> *"I found my work experience relevant and transferable to the course, empowering me further to assist and support service users."* (Phil, Social Work)
>
> *"I've been impressed by the number of opportunities to meet employers at York."* (Silvia, Management)

A key objective of our Employability Strategy is to enable all students to access work experience during their time at York. Short-term opportunities include internships, with 285 being created by our Student Internship Bureau in 2016-17, engaging with over 60 regional businesses.

Our last QAA Institutional Review (2012) identified as good practice "the extensive opportunities for students to develop their employability skills through engagement with local and regional communities". Established over 22 years ago, our York Students in Schools programme saw a 30% increase from 2014-16, with 864 students experiencing the classroom environment as volunteers in 2016-17.

From 2018, all undergraduate students will have the opportunity to pursue a year in employment. This significant investment was underpinned by strong evidence over several years that our students taking programmes with a year in industry achieved significantly higher rates of employment or graduate-level study.

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[5] *Working Paper W16/06, using data from the 1999 graduating cohort.*

[6] *The negative core and split flags for part-time provision under median earnings arise from this provision being heavily concentrated in a specific small cohort.*

Personalised support is available for all students experiencing employment. For work placements, our Careers and Placements team provides specialist training and coaching for students with declared disabilities, to help them to gain a placement and transfer to a working context. Use of the Student Internship Bureau by disabled students is currently 4% higher than the average for the University's student population, illustrating our success in placing students with additional needs.

In addition to direct employment, we support and help to sustain student-led activities linked to employment and networking. An example is the York Finance Conference, which is organised by our students and is the largest student-led finance conference in Europe. It gives a unique insight into investment banking, investment management, consulting and accounting, and enables students to network with top-level guest speakers (such as the Chief Operating Officer of the Bank of England in 2016) and recent graduates from the most prestigious financial institutions.

The York Professional Alumni Networks provide regular opportunities for students and recent graduates to engage with professional leaders. Networking sectors include STEM; banking, finance and investment; government, charity and the Third Sector; and the creative industries.

Students can network virtually with our 120,000 alumni through the Profiles and Mentors web platform, which was awarded the AGCAS Award for Excellence in Technology in September 2016. This gives our students the ability to research job sectors and career paths via case studies from York alumni, to post questions and request professional mentoring. Almost 1000 profiles have been created, spanning 22 job sectors and 51 countries.

In 2014, we were the first university to launch a crowdfunding platform for students to fundraise for projects aligned to their interests, both academic and extra-curricular. Training is offered to students to ensure optimum outcomes. To date, 119 projects have been funded, ranging from staging performances to helping to facilitate volunteering in other countries.

Improving employability

> *"The University of York does a huge amount to prepare students to face the world of work. I've been incredibly impressed at how the faculty and careers service have really sought to work in partnership with us."* (Laura Yates, Head of Graduate Talent, Clifford Chance)

> *"York Strengths is a great concept; the Careers Service clearly recognise the importance of engaging with their students at an early stage of their University experience and this will undoubtedly benefit all of their students throughout their time at York but also when they make the crucial next step. There was a real focus on students finding out what their strengths and development areas were but with appropriate levels of support in place too."* (Andrew Bargary, Campus & Schools Engagement Lead, PwC)

In 1998, we launched the York Award to help students to evidence, recognise and reward personal development alongside their degree programme. The award demonstrates to employers how students have taken a proactive approach to life at university to enhance their own personal development. We were the first university in the UK to introduce such an award, and the concept has been much copied since. The scheme encourages wide-ranging participation in development activities, particularly among students who might lack access to these opportunities through family networks.

The inclusivity of the York Award is evidenced by the proportion of students from lower SEC backgrounds. Between 2015-17, an average of 24.8% of participants were from SEC groups 4-7. This compares to a University average of 20.5% in the same period.

Students obtaining the York Award have consistently demonstrated better graduate destinations through DLHE compared to the University average. Over the five-year period 2011-12 to 2015-16 they were, on average, 7.08% more likely to be in a positive destination compared to those without the Award.

Building on the success of the York Award, *York Strengths* enables every first-year student to receive a comprehensive assessment of their personal strengths, allowing them to better understand and overcome their weaknesses in a way that also builds confidence. Piloted in 2016-17, York Strengths is a sector-leading programme, designed in partnership with leading recruitment psychologists CAPP and with input from six major graduate recruiting organisations: Aviva, PwC, Teach First, Glaxo, NHS and Clifford Chance.

The programme includes an online situational judgement test, to generate an initial indication of the student's main strengths; 'Strengths Day', a highly interactive series of exercises to pursue one or two strengths in depth; and a revised York Award, enabling students to deploy their new level of self-awareness in planning actions. From 2017-18, all of our 4,300 first year students are expected to take up this intensive development opportunity and build an action plan.

The pilot confirmed that an early grasp of strengths can focus a student's consideration of potential careers and the acquisition of relevant work experience and competencies. Employers also know that applicants with enhanced self-awareness are likely to have made more informed choices in their applications and thus progress successfully in their careers.

York Strengths is highly personalised in the feedback given to students. Pilot year participants reported strongly increased confidence in career planning, drawing on individually-tailored analysis and reflection from the programme.

Personalised support ensures that all students can achieve positive outcomes. Our graduate internship scheme targets recent graduates who are struggling to gain work experience at a commensurate level. Over five years of delivery the scheme has been accessed by over 150 graduates. Around 42% of these received a bursary whilst studying, relative to 27% of the overall student cohort. 81% of participants moved into graduate level destinations.

Recognising that global employers want to recruit graduates with international experience, we have invested significantly in opportunities for students to enhance their preparedness for global employment. Programmes include Erasmus+ and our own bespoke International Study Centres co-delivered with Georgetown University, Peking University, University of Cape Town, UNICAMP in Brazil, and others.

Students interested in studying, working or volunteering abroad are offered a free *Languages for International Mobility* course which includes cultural competency awareness and conversation afternoons. More broadly, opportunities for students to prepare for global employment include our *Languages for All* foreign language courses, offered from beginner to degree standard. Classes are open to all students.

6. Conclusion

We have a clear vision for teaching and learning excellence which aligns with the TEF framework. By engaging and collaborating with students in the design and development of

the York Pedagogy, we have created an approach that links their ambitions to employability in a way that is now firmly established across the University.

We have supplemented this with a framework for employability, York Strengths, to optimise the ability of every individual student to reflect on their capabilities within and beyond their degree programme and to prepare for successful employment.

Our partnership with students is deeply embedded and is captured in the commitments of Together York - the York Community Declaration. Our investment in building networks with our alumni demonstrate that the whole York community is committed to ensuring that York students have the best possible chance to compete in a globally competitive jobs market.

All our TEF indicators exceed benchmark with five of the six core metrics above the statistical significance threshold for positive flags. We have 41 positive split flags covering all three dimensions of quality. We offer the additional evidence in this submission to show that the experience and achievements of our students are fully consistent with a Gold award.

This provider submission was prepared by a team which included our Students' Union President and Academic Officer. Drafts were considered by the University Teaching Committee, University Executive Board and Senate.

January 2018