Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework Year 3 Submission

1 Introduction

Buckinghamshire New University (Bucks) was founded in 1891 as the School of Science and Art in High Wycombe. In 1999 we were awarded University College status, and in 2007 University status changing our title to Buckinghamshire New University. In 2009 we consolidated our estate, since creating three campuses, with the main facilities at our High Wycombe Campus, and satellite campuses in Uxbridge and in Aylesbury. This period also included much work to develop the estate, including the construction of the innovative Gateway Building in High Wycombe, a state-of-the-art integrated learning complex and RIBA award winner in 2010.

Since our founding, our mission has been to transform lives through employment-focused and skills-based teaching. Our vision, encapsulated in our University Strategy 2021, is to be a leading university for professional and creative education and applied research. Strategy 2021's three core elements – education, research and innovation, and people – drive our activities through *inter alia* our educational strategy, our Bucks academic framework, our retention strategy, and numerous associated policies. Our educational aim is to provide highly accessible university learning that will transform lives and nurture abilities in our graduates to enable them to succeed and ultimately change their world. To do this, we stretch and challenge our students, and build strong partnerships with organisations to give our students an unprecedented range of opportunities, be it working with BBC Introducing or with Reading or Watford Football Clubs. We are also a responsive and self-critical institution, seeking feedback from students and other evidence of the impact of our work to evaluate our strategic success and shape our ongoing activity.

Our mission also has been always to reduce barriers to higher education, enabling all that can to succeed, and making a real difference to the lives of people from all backgrounds. We maintain today a highly diverse student intake with HESA UKPIs revealing we are above the sector average for the proportion of our students coming from state schools or colleges (96%). We are above the sector average for proportions of mature students (37%) and part-time students (38%, 99% of whom are mature – the 9th highest figure in the sector). Of our UK domiciled, young, full-time, other undergraduate entrants, we have the highest proportion of students from state schools or colleges in the sector (100%). 11% come from low participation neighbourhoods

Of our student body in the TEF period, HEIDI+ reveals we rank 22nd in the UK for our proportion of students over 21 years (58%), 17th for the proportion over 25 years (35%), and 13th for the proportion over 30 years (26%). 12% of our students have a disability. 58% of our students are female, against 56% for the sector. We have the 25th highest proportion of BAME students in the country, 36% against 19% for the sector, the 25th highest proportion of Asian students in the UK (16%) and the 11th highest proportion of Black students (18%). TEF contextual data show more than a quarter of our students come from lower participation areas (POLAR quintiles 1 and 2), and more than one-third from areas with higher levels of deprivation (IMD quintiles 1 and 2).

Reflecting our historic mission, Bucks has consistently accepted students with a low entry tariff, resulting in 2014/15, for example, in the 8th lowest tariff in the sector. Ensuring excellent student outcomes for such a diverse intake brings many challenges, and has required us to develop a distinctive and highly successful style of education. It is one built on a strong sense of an academic learning community in which students are partners and whose feedback we use extensively to inform our continuous improvement. It is one in which small class sizes promote immersive and highly interactive teaching, focused on practical, employment-related learning. We combine this with excellent academic support, and successfully deploy a variety of approaches to support and engage our students throughout their study and beyond.

Consequently, our students achieve outstanding employment outcomes with 95% in employment within 6 months of graduating, a figure that exceeds our benchmark by an amount that ranks us 57th out of 153 institutions, and ensures our students have an excellent foundation for sustained employment. Given our diverse intake, and especially our low entry tariff, analysis shows that the University adds considerable value to its students' graduate prospects, reflected in our rates of

highly skilled employment – a discussion to which we return later.

The success of our educational approach is reflected in our metrics during this TEF period. Student satisfaction at Bucks is high and in some cases significantly exceeds benchmark – academic support in part-time mode; assessment and feedback for full-time other undergraduates. Continuation is also high and in the part-time mode significantly and substantially exceeds benchmark. Employment is within benchmark and has been increasing annually throughout the TEF period. Highly skilled employment has also improved during this TEF period, for both full-time and part-time students, but appears to be a significant challenge for the University. We believe these data bear further scrutiny and analysis, and that in this context they too provide confirmation of the University's excellent performance.

We believe these data clearly signify a Silver level of performance. For full-time students, 4 out of the 6 indicators meet or exceed benchmark, with two positive splits, and only one indicator is below, rendering the University's performance as Silver for our predominant mode of delivery. For part-time students, 5 of the 6 indicators meet or exceed benchmark, with two being positively flagged, and one within the top 10% in the sector, also rendering our performance for part-time students as Silver. Overall, these TEF data provide striking evidence of the University's success, and confirmation that our strategy is enabling us successfully to fulfil our historic mission.

2 Teaching Quality

2.1 Student Engagement (TQ1)

The University's education strategy prioritises high-quality, high-intensity teaching, focused on real-world, practical learning and designed to produce very high levels of student engagement. We prioritise small class sizes and team teaching to promote highly interactive sessions and support the development of an effective learning community, one that produces positive outcomes for all. In addition to state-of-the-art subject-specific facilities, we embed the use of technology in learning and teaching practices to support engagement, simulation, feedback and assessment (e.g., Kahoot, ShowMe,SimPad). Simulation, in particular, is a strength of our approach, allowing students' classroom experience to reflect more fully the real environments in which they will work, and is based on a history of using simulation effectively in teaching on our nursing, operating department practice, social work, telemedicine, aviation, policing, media, and other programmes.

Contact Time. Our strategy is to cultivate skills of autonomy in learning, and consequently our approach to contact time is that it should be greatest during the earliest stages of a student's undergraduate degree, reducing as students become more skilled learners. Across all our undergraduate programmes, and based on 30 weeks of teaching, contact time at foundation level and level 4 averages 13 hours per week, reducing to 10 hours per week at level 5, and 9 hours per week at level 6.

Class size. The University's class size is small as shown by our computation of teaching intensity (Table 1). We calculate a measure of 'effective class size', weighting session duration by actual class size and by the number of teaching staff in each session. 88% of student time is spent in smaller, practically focused classes, and 19% of class time involves team teaching. Nearly 90% of student time is spent in classes with an effective size of 16 or less. Average module size during the TEF period stands at 19 FTE, reducing from just over 20 in 2014/15 to just over 18 in 2016/17.

Table 1. Teaching Intensity and Effective Class Size at Bucks

Key Session Types	% of sessions	% of time	Weighted Class Size	% of sessions team taught	Effective Class Size
Seminar	34%	35%	16.9	9%	16.0
Workshop	20%	26%	15.3	14%	14.0
Practical	14%	15%	14.6	37%	11.1
Lecture	14%	12%	43.4	17%	33.3
Studio	6%	3%	13.0	14%	11.6
Computing	4%	3%	15.6	7%	14.6

Attendance. The University's policy on attendance and engagement aims to ensure all students fully engage in their studies and are encouraged and supported to do so, with proactive monitoring of engagement based on a number of means, including attendance and use of the University's learning environment. Module and personal tutors follow up with students who do not attend to identify their reasons and any support that can be offered.

The impact of our approach is seen clearly in our student attendance data, which we monitor as one method for assessing engagement. We have seen attendance rise significantly as a result, by 12% from an average of 104 attendance events per student during 2014/15, to 116 attendance events in 2016/17. Over a span of 30 weeks of the academic calendar, these equate to approximately 3.5 attendance events per week in 2014/15 and 3.9 in 2016/17. Note, attendance events can last from the duration of a single teaching session to an entire day spent on campus.

Satisfaction and Engagement. Our high levels of student engagement are manifest in participation in surveys and other methods designed to elicit feedback and engagement with the processes of teaching enhancement (e.g., student representation in annual monitoring). Evidence for the quality of the University's teaching comes from many sources, including surveys such as the NSS. In the current TEF period, 2015-17, the University's average satisfaction rating for teaching was 85%, equal to the current sector average, with 89% of students agreeing that staff are good at explaining things, and 82% agreeing staff have made the subject interesting, both figures above the current sector average. In addition, 83% of students agree that their course is intellectually stimulating.

These data are corroborated by the University's internal module evaluation survey, issued for every occurrence of every module. 81% of students in the TEF period regard their module as being intellectually stimulating. Satisfaction with teaching stands at 84% with 90% saying staff are enthusiastic about their subject, and 84% saying they are satisfied with the module content.

These results also complement those of the national, HEA-coordinated UKES, in which Bucks took part for the first time in 2017. Responses to the survey show Bucks students to be highly engaged with their subjects and with their teaching staff, and receiving appropriate intellectual stimulation. Overall, the survey showed engagement at Bucks to be higher (0.2%) than the sector as a whole and the University scored above average for questions relating to Learning with Others, Interacting with Staff, and Reflecting and Connecting, some of which are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Bucks student engagement as shown in UKES 2017

Theme	Question	Bucks	Difference from Sector Average
Learning with Others	Worked with other students on course projects or assignments	2nd quartile	+2.8%
	Explained course material to one or more students	2nd quartile	+3.2%
Interacting with staff	Asked questions in taught sessions or contributed to discussions about course material in other ways	1st quartile	+6.4%
	Discussed your academic performance and/or feedback with teaching staff	2nd quartile	+1.2%
	Talked about your career plans with teaching staff or advisors	1st quartile	+2.8%
	Discussed ideas from your course with teaching staff outside taught sessions, including by email/online	1st quartile	+4.3%
Reflecting and connecting	Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue	2nd quartile	+1.9%
	Changed the way you thought about a concept or issue as a result of what you learned	2nd quartile	+0.1%

The HEA report on the UKES 2017 outlines the importance of students discussing their career plans and the association observed between these and students gaining valuable employability skills. We are delighted that there is growing evidence of the approach we have long believed in, and demonstrate later in this document the vital employability skills gained by our students.

Response Rates. We celebrate the high levels of student engagement at Bucks evidenced by survey response rates. The University has excellent participation rates in national and institutional surveys. In 2015, for example, the University's NSS response rate equalled the sector average, but has since overtaken the sector and now stands 9% above the average response rate for England, and 2% above the response rate for NSS top-quartile institutions (see Figure 1).

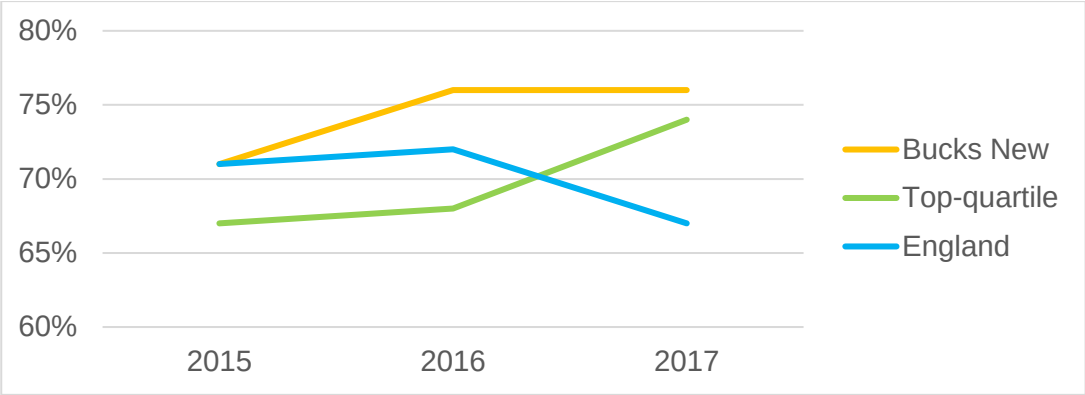

Figure 1. Response Rates in NSS

The University sees a similar pattern in response rates to optional NSS question banks. Despite their optional nature, these reveal impressive response rates at Bucks: in 2015, 15% above the average for England and 19% above the NSS top-quartile institutions, rising in 2017 to 18% above the average for England, and 24% above the NSS top-quartile institutions. Response rates to the University's twice-yearly module evaluation survey (MES) are also high by sector standards. During the TEF period, the response rate has averaged 44%, and initiatives are being undertaken to improve this still further. Likewise, the University achieved a comparatively high response rate in UKES 2017 despite this being our first year of participation: 1 in 6 of eligible students (16%) participated in the survey, which compares favourably with UKES response rates within the sector as a whole (14%) and confirms the University's students' engagement is within the upper quartile.

Students' Union. Lastly, we encourage our students to play a full role in their University experience, believing that this can enhance focus on and engagement with academic study. The University's Students' Union is one of the best in the country for student satisfaction, 7th highest in NSS 2017, and is very successful at engaging our students. During the period of the TEF, we have seen a dramatic increase in student engagement with the University's Students' Union, rising almost three-fold (by 186%) from 2014/15 to 2016/17. There has been an increase of 172% in engagement with volunteering activities in our local and regional communities, an 8% increase in engagement with Sport for Fun, and an 11% increase in engagement with Societies. This engagement is highly effective in raising students' academic success – those engaging with the Student's Union enjoying a 3% higher progression rate than other students, a 7% higher good honours rate, and a 10% lower proportion gaining an ordinary degree.

2.2 Valuing Teaching (TQ2)

The University places great value on the quality of its teaching and the qualifications of its teaching staff, building a system of recognition for and expectations of teaching qualifications into its Academic Framework, which sets expectations for all academic staff within the context of Strategy 2021. Within the domain of education, for example, it links the professorial role to HEA principal fellowship, associate professor to senior fellowship, and senior lecturer and lecturer to fellowship.

HEA Fellowship. To meet its strategic aims, the University offers extensive HEA-accredited provision, including a Postgraduate Certificate that offers a route to HEA fellowship. Reflecting our

peer observation policy, peer observation is embedded in the programme, and an analysis over the TEF period suggests participants consider this to be the most useful element. 100% of participants believe the programme, including observing and reflecting on practice, has a positive impact on their teaching. 96% say their teaching practice integrates approaches, techniques or activities they participated in; 92% say it reflects insights based on observation of others.

Reflecting our strategy, the proportion of academic staff with fellowship of the HEA has consistently exceeded the sector average. According to HESA 2014/15 data, the University was ranked 36th in the sector (N=130) for the proportion of staff holding a recognised teaching qualification (60%). It was also above sector median for the proportion of staff recognised as a) a Senior Fellow, b) Principal Fellow, c) holding individual National Teaching Fellowships, or d) accredited as a teacher of their subject by a professional UK body. Among HEIs, Bucks had the 5th highest proportion of academic staff holding a PGCE or equivalent UK qualification (57.3%) and the 19th highest proportion of these five forms of recognition held by its academic staff in the sector.

As the University has pursued its strategy of supporting staff to obtain fellowship, and develop to more senior grades of fellowship, HEA records show the number of fellows at Bucks has increased from 121 in 2014/15 to 145 in 2016/17, an increase of 20%. The distribution of fellowships has shifted also, reflecting our academic framework, with the proportion of senior and principal fellows increasing from a combined 7% in 2014/15 to 17% in 2016/17 and, as we have encouraged associate lecturers and those at the start of their teaching careers (e.g., PhD students) to obtain fellowship, so too the proportion of associate fellows has grown from 3% to 31%.

Staff Awards. The University makes awards to teaching staff based on excellence in relation to learning and teaching as evidenced through student feedback, student outcomes and recognition by other staff. In 2015/16, 20 student-nominated tutor awards and an additional 5 Vice-Chancellor awards were made. In 2016/17, 27 tutor and 13 Vice-Chancellor awards were made and, in 2017/18, 15 tutor and 9 Vice-Chancellor awards were made.

The University works in close partnership with the Students' Union and actively supports Students' Union awards. 5 student-nominated awards are made annually for Excellence and Innovation in Student Learning Support, Demonstrating Excellence in Academic Leadership, Excellence and Innovation in Learning and Teaching Practice, Professional Service Employee Partner of the Year, and Academic Staff Partner of the Year. Thus, in the past 3 years 58 different members of staff have been recognised for their outstanding contributions, 55 of whom are teaching staff.

2.3 Rigour and Stretch (TQ3)

Quality Assurance. Student representatives are involved in all course quality assurance processes, including approval, validation, annual monitoring, and periodic review. Guidance for student representatives has been improved by the Student Engagement in Quality Enhancement initiative, a Students' Union led project coordinated by The Student Engagement Partnership.

The University requires all proposals for courses to be subject to rigorous validation, each panel including student representation not from the proposing Department. Following approval of an outline proposal by Academic Planning Committee, course teams prepare a full business case and associated course and curriculum documentation. Each course is scrutinised by two external reviewers – an external academic and an industry professional/service user. Over the TEF period, we have obtained external scrutiny from 72 academics, 66 industry professionals, and 6 service users. Externals are asked particularly to comment on academic standards, learning and teaching, assessment regime, PSRB standards, relevance to employment in the sector and skills.

Periodic Review. Our periodic review policy requires programmes to be re-examined every 5 years in light of developments in research, professional and industry practice, pedagogy, changes in the external environment such as requirements of PSRBs and continued alignment with the University's strategy and mission. During the TEF period, we have conducted 22 periodic reviews.

External Examiners. We calibrate the rigour of our course design and delivery, including assessment, via the external examiner system. External examiners complete an annual report and

questionnaire to indicate their view of *inter alia* our academic standards, assessments, and marking and feedback. External endorsement has been extremely high and rising within the TEF period: 96% of examiners expressed overall satisfaction with our courses in 2014/15, rising to 98% in 2015/16 and 99% in 2016/17. Parity with sector standards is judged to be high, with 99% of examiners endorsing equivalence of assessment tasks to those of other institutions, and 95% similarly judging student achievement. Externals believe our students successfully demonstrate achievement of learning outcomes (99%), reflecting subject benchmarks (99%). They also endorse the extent to which our curricula are reflective of the needs of employers and industry (94%).

Surveys. We evaluate the extent to which our students experience stretch and course challenge using a number of survey tools. In the UKES, for example, an impressive 92% of students agree that their course emphasised taking responsibility for their own learning, and 85% say the course challenged them to do their best work. We see similar levels of reported course challenge within NSS (79% agree their course challenged them to do their best work) and in the University's internal module evaluation survey (78% say their module challenged them to do their best work).

2.4 Feedback (TQ4)

External examiners. External reviewers and examiners provide a ringing endorsement of the appropriateness and effectiveness of our assessment and feedback approach. 99% of external examiners endorse the sector equivalence of our assessments, 95% endorse the appropriateness of our assessment regimes, and 98% believe teaching staff give clear and supportive feedback.

Surveys. We also draw on student surveys to understand the effectiveness of our approach to assessment and feedback. During the TEF period, the University's NSS satisfaction for assessment and feedback has averaged 74.9%, consistently exceeding the average for the sector as a whole (73.5%). Throughout the TEF period, satisfaction at Bucks has significantly exceeded the sector for the clarity of marking criteria (by 3%), the timeliness of feedback (by 4%), the helpfulness of feedback (by 3%), and the detail of feedback comments (by 5%).

The University consistently uses optional NSS question banks to probe aspects of learning and teaching, and to refine strategy and monitor and steer the delivery of enhancements. The optional question bank related to Assessment used in 2017 shows, for example, that the University exceeds the sector average (by 1%) for an assessment regime that probes deep rather than rote learning ("Teaching staff test what I have understood rather than what I have memorised"). Student feedback has informed the development of the University's 2017 assessment and feedback policy.

Academic outcomes. Our assessment and feedback approach is highly effective. As engagement has risen during the TEF period, there has been a consistent decline in the proportion of students not submitting assessment elements (see Table 3) and improvements in other indicators – declines in the proportion not completing modules, and increases in average module grades and the equivalent GPA (calculated according to recommendations of the HEA GPA pilot 2013-14).

Table 3. Improving academic outcomes at Bucks (2014/15 to 2016/17)

	% Not completing modules	% Not submitting an assessment element	Average module mark	GPA
2014/15	3.7%	9.3%	54.3	2.7
2015/16	3.3%	7.7%	56.5	2.8
2016/17	3.2%	6.3%	57.3	2.9

Where possible, we use GPA to consider possible grade inflation. Students obtaining qualifications in 2007/08 joined Bucks prior to it acquiring University status, and entered with a much lower entry tariff – 193 points as opposed to 247 points during the TEF period. The supplementary grade inflation metrics show our good honours rate is stable with a modest increase in the proportion of first class degrees. Our analysis of GPA suggests these do not reflect grade inflation, but sustained improvements in students' academic outcomes throughout their degree programmes. Confirmation is provided by our external examiners, as noted earlier. There has been no adjustment to the University's degree classification algorithm within the last 10 years.

We also see a direct link between engagement and academic outcomes. For example, those who attend more than 100 times per academic year (more than 3 times per week) have an 8% higher progression rate than those attending fewer than 100 times, and an 11% higher good honours rate. These excellent outcomes are testament to the success of the Bucks educational strategy.

3 Learning Environment

3.1 Resources (LE1)

VLE. The University's virtual learning environment represents a key aspect of our students' learning and teaching environment, and engagement with this has increased significantly during the TEF period. For example, whilst the number of login sessions has remained stable, the duration for which each student is logged in increased by 21% from 2014/15 to 2016/17.

That the environment is effective in supporting students' learning is seen their academic outcomes. For example, medium and high users of the VLE have a progression rate that is 6% higher than that of low users. This difference is greater among students from an SEC 4-8 background: 10% against a 5% difference for students from SEC 1-3, showing that the VLE is more significant in supporting these students' learning. We see similar effects for other groups, indicating the VLE's particular importance for the learning of BAME students, male students, and disabled students.

Library. Attendance at the University's libraries has increased during the period of this TEF, reflecting their strategic design for social learning, with provision of different forms of study space. We have also created additional social learning space outside the library, e.g., opening the Study Lounge, in partnership with the Students' Union, to provide a flexible space for students and staff to work individually or together in a less formal environment. The design of the libraries is intended to allow free flow both in and out of the library spaces; however, we monitor physical attendance within the library through relevant building access control. This shows that attendance within the University's libraries has increased by 0.4%, despite the increasing availability of electronic resources and other social learning spaces. Students, on average, attend the libraries 30 times per academic year, or once per week of the University's teaching calendar.

Satisfaction with the library as measured by NSS has also risen during the TEF period, from 79% in 2014 to a 3-year average of 82% for 2015-17. This rise is mirrored within the University's module evaluation survey where satisfaction has risen in this period from 80% to 83%, and within the UKES where 2017 data show satisfaction with the library resources has risen to 84%.

That the library is highly effective in supporting learners is evident in the strong association between library usage and academic success: relative to low users, medium and higher users have a 10% higher progression rate and a 15% higher good honours rate.

Learning Development Unit (LDU). In 2016/17, 1165 students made use of the LDU, receiving 3115 appointments and a total of 2558 hours of staff support. Support includes group sessions (lectures/workshops) but 59% is delivered in one-to-one, face-to-face meetings. The nature of the support requested includes structure of assessments (19%), referencing (15%), reflective skills (12%) and critical analysis (12%). Language and numeracy support amount to 20% of support given. This support is informed by our current research on engagement and our active partnership to the REACT project, one that aims to understand how better to engage 'hard to reach' students.

In 2015 and 2016 we used NSS optional questions B8 (Welfare resources and facilities) to evaluate the effectiveness of student support. Satisfaction rose during this period to stand 2% above sector average, 82% agreeing that there is sufficient provision (3% above sector average) and 79% agreeing that information and advice has been helpful (2% above sector average).

The effectiveness of the service is seen in the academic success of students who use the service. For example, those who use the LDU see a 1% higher progression rate compared to other students, as well as 1.5% fewer ordinary degrees than the University average.

Building on this success, for 2017/18 the University's LDU developed a 6-week programme for level 4 students, supporting them in this key transition into higher education, and offering additional

support in areas such as learning strategies, effective reading and note-taking. More than 300 students chose to attend this programme, giving particularly high satisfaction ratings for sessions on academic writing (92%) and on referencing and avoiding plagiarism (90%). 94% felt the sessions fitted well within their existing study timetable, reflecting our strategy of centrally timetabling them. The University is monitoring the effectiveness of this programme through an evaluation of continuation, attainment and outcomes for these students.

Careers Service. The nature and quality of client interactions with the careers service has changed steadily over the course of this TEF period, reflecting a strategic shift to give more personalised support. In 2016/17, 82% of interactions were for face-to-face appointments, a figure that has dramatically increased from the 56% of interactions in 2014/15. These interactions allow service professionals to work with students to create and update personalised action plans. During the period of this TEF, approximately 86% of all students were given a personalised action plan. In 2016/17, 63% of client appointments either led to the creation of a personalised action plan or an update to an existing one, a figure that has risen from 54% in 2014/15. 73% of student appointments are focused around support with CVs, job applications or interviews, and 16% with general careers guidance and job search. Typically, appointments are with students in the final stage of their degree programme (49%), but increasingly students at levels 4 (22%) and 5 (24%) are using the service, reflecting the University's shift to focus on employability from course start.

The University evaluates the careers service using optional NSS question bank B1 (Careers). Satisfaction with the service has risen from 72% in 2014 to 75% in 2017. 87% of students believe that as a result of their course, they have improved their career prospects, a figure equal to the sector average, and confirming the quality of support students receive.

The effectiveness of the service is shown not only in the employment outcomes of Bucks students but also in their academic outcomes. Those using the service during the TEF period had an 8% higher progression rate and a 6% higher good honours rate than other students.

3.2 Scholarship, Research and Professional Practice (LE2)

Live briefs. The educational strategy at Bucks prioritises students' exposure to and engagement with new ideas at the forefront of research and innovation, including practice within their industry. The approach comes into sharp focus in 'live briefs' – student assessment tasks co-designed by the University and an external, often industrial, partner and in which students work on a live project contributing to the solution of real-world problems – see the case studies in Table 4 and Table 5.

Table 4. Live brief for automating map production from remotely sensed imagery.

Within the University's Department of Computing, students engaged with a research programme funded by the Australian Coal Association Research Program (ACARP). As part of their level 6 module in software 'Design Patterns', they tackled the problem of how to automate the production of vegetation maps from remotely sensed imagery for the Australian coal mining industry. Students established software development and version-control environments, reviewed and improved Python code and developed the Graphical User Interface (GUI). Adopting the industry standard 'Agile' method for managing and reporting progress, students disseminated their work via a Skype conference with a partner at The Centre for Mined Land Restoration (University of Queensland) and recorded their experience as a LinkedIn project.

We evaluate students' exposure to current research in different ways, including through external reviewers at course validation and the views of our external examiners. We judge student satisfaction using NSS optional question bank B7 (Course Delivery). 79% of students agree that their learning has benefited from modules informed by current research; 81% agree that practical activities on their course have helped them to learn (2% higher than sector average). In the University's module evaluation survey, 85% of students in the TEF period agreed their modules were highly relevant to current practice, data which confirm the value of our assessment approach.

Table 5. Live brief for creating a range of themed, knitted fabrics.

Students working on Textiles and Surface Design engaged with luxury lifestyle brand Tengri who work with Kanghai noble yarns (yak fibre). Tengri is also a social enterprise working directly with Mongolian herding families and works on the system of a transparent supply chain and sustainable production methods. Tengri works with UK heritage spinners and weaving companies to create luxury yarn and product. Students worked on a live brief to create a range of knitted fabrics for the theme 'Rider,' pushing their knowledge of yarns and sustainable materials and working with a limited natural colour palette. Having given a 5-minute presentation to Tengri founder Nancy Johnston, they were asked to develop lengths of fabrics that were then showcased at Vancouver fashion week 2017 as a collection of concept coats. The partnership with Tengri continues with another live brief and this year the University will be featured in a short CNN documentary film on Tengri and the educational work of Nancy Johnston.

Research and inquiry. The University also evaluates exposure of students to research and innovation through the UKES. Some of these data have been reported earlier in Table 2. The UKES data show that Bucks is in the upper quartile for the extent to which students' courses connect learning to real-world problems or issues (67%, 2% above sector average), and in the second quartile (and at sector average) for the extent to which students tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective. Overall, for 'research and inquiry', Bucks equals the sector average (66%), and exceeds it for the extent to which students learn about the outcomes of current research (2% above average), and the extent to which students conduct research (2% above average).

We also ask our external examiners to consider the extent to which students are actually involved in (as opposed merely to being exposed to) the latest developments in research, scholarship or professional practice. 85% of examiners agree that students are involved in this way, a figure which we believe is testament to the success of our educational approach.

3.3 Personalised Learning (LE3)

Personal tutoring and academic support. Bucks prides itself in creating a vital academic community in which staff and students feel valued, welcome, and able to play a full role. At the heart of our student-staff relationship is the personal tutor, a key role articulated within our personal tutoring policy. All students at Bucks are allocated a personal tutor whose role is to work as an advocate, monitor their students' academic progress and wellbeing and ensure they receive appropriate and timely advice. We evaluate the personal tutor model by examining student satisfaction in relation to academic support. Within the NSS, satisfaction with academic support has risen from 79% in 2014 to equal the sector average throughout the TEF period at 81%. Satisfaction with advice and support with studies equals the sector average at 82%, and satisfaction with being able to contact staff when needed also equals the sector average at 84%. Satisfaction at Bucks with the availability of advice when making study choices stands at 79%, 2% above sector average.

These data are corroborated by the University's module evaluation survey, showing 84% satisfaction, for example, with availability of staff. The University's UKES data also show the high quality of academic support, with 86% satisfaction for staff availability (1% above sector average), and 75% satisfaction with course advice and guidance (0.4% above sector average). They are also supported by data from the NSS 2017 which confirms the extent to which students value the learning community at Bucks – satisfaction stands at 80%, 3% better than sector average.

Personal tutoring is augmented by the University's support services and by the Students' Union, who provide a wide variety of means for students to engage in ways that suit them best. Our Fitness to Study process, for example, is designed to re-engage students with their studies – in 2016/17, 83% of students who were engaged with Fitness to Study continued with their studies, 8% voluntarily interrupted their studies, and only 8% withdrew.

Students' Union. The University works closely with the Students' Union to offer all students the 'Big Deal' – an opportunity for students to take part in a wide range of activities free of charge. Activities

include events and entertainment, additional skills workshops, sports, recreational activities and societies, and the opportunity to take on the position of student representative. Unique within the sector, the Big Deal has considerable impact in enhancing levels of engagement and in supporting retention. An analysis by an external agency (Red Brick) commissioned in March 2017 showed that 88% of students felt participating in the Big Deal had positively impacted their employability. Of those students who had considered withdrawing from University, 42% were positively influenced to remain by the Big Deal initiative. 41% felt that the Big Deal made a significant contribution to the sense of community at Bucks, 50% said they gained confidence because of the Big Deal, 40% cited improved communication skills and 40% improved team-working abilities.

Engagement with the Students' Union is strong for all kinds of student. For example, of our campus based students, 68% of those with a known disability engage with the SU, as opposed to 57% of non-disabled students. 51% of BAME students and 64% of white students engage with the SU. Working class students engage slightly less (62%) than non-working-class students (70%), however, this effect reverses for white working-class males, 71% of whom engage with the SU at some point during their studies. The SU also helps the University engage non-campus based students, and especially so for BAME students - 8% more of these BAME students engage with the SU than do their white counterparts. Similarly, 11% more of off-campus disabled students engage with the SU than do their non-disabled counterparts.

Engagement with the Students' Union is strongly associated with a much-reduced withdrawal rate, typically 5% lower than for those who do not engage during this TEF period. Our data show that the retention benefit of engagement is greatest for white working-class students, with withdrawal rates for white working-class males improved by 8%, and for white working-class females by 2%. We see similar impacts for other socio-economic and ethnic groups.

Engagement with the Students' Union also positively impacts rates of progression and of obtaining final awards. For white working-class males, for example, there is a 2% reduction in non-progression associated with engagement with the Students' Union, and again there are similar impacts for other socio-economic and ethnic groups. Engagement with the SU boosts the retention rate of disabled students, reducing their withdrawal rate by around 4%.

Support services. The University's support services are effective in helping to improve students' chances of academic success, as indicated in section 3.1. Our services engage strongly with all students, and especially those from backgrounds traditionally associated with disadvantage. For example, the library is disproportionately used by BAME students, with the proportion of medium and high loan users being 10% higher among BAME students than white students. The proportion of medium and high loan users is 12% higher among disabled students as opposed to non-disabled students; 1% higher among students from SEC 4-8 as opposed to SEC 1-3; 1% higher among POLAR quintiles 1-2 students, compared to quintiles 3-5; 5% higher among 30+ year olds compared to the University average; and 9% higher for female compared to male students.

The LDU also strongly engages with all students. During this TEF period, 23% of BAME students used the LDU, compared to 12% of white students; 20% of students with a known disability, compared to 16% of non-disabled students; 19% of SEC 4-8 students, compared to 17% of SEC 1-3; 23% of 30+ year olds, compared to 16% for all students; and 23% of female students, compared to 12% of males. And we see a similar pattern for our Careers Service, with BAME students tending to use the service more than white students (0.3% more), students with a disability more than non-disabled (2% higher), students from SEC 4-8 backgrounds more than those from SEC 1-3 (0.1% higher), and students from POLAR quintile 1 more than other students (2% higher).

Withdrawal. Reflecting these strategically led approaches to support all students, withdrawal rates at Bucks have been steadily declining during the TEF period (Figure 2). These declines are seen for students of all socio-economic backgrounds, for both female and male students, for disabled and non-disabled students, for all age groups, ethnicities, entry tariff groups, regardless of time of entry to the University (February or September) or mode of study, and are a clear sign that the strategic approach we take to student support is highly effective and benefits all students.

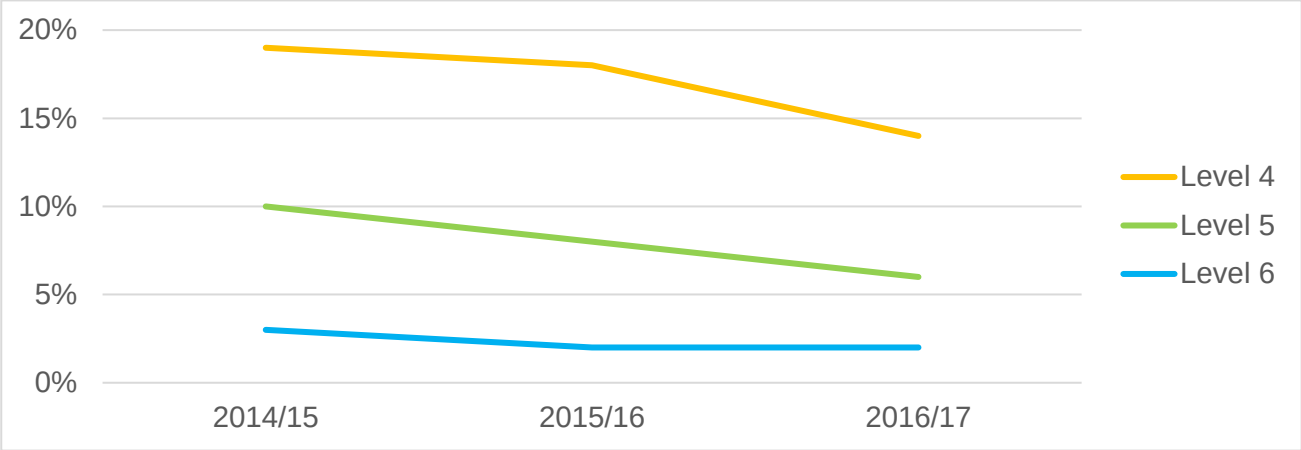

Figure 2. Undergraduate withdrawal rates 2014/15 - 2016/17

4 Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

4.1 Employment and Further Study (SO1)

Employment. Overall, the University has an enviable record in securing employment for its students, with the HESA EPI at 95%, exceeding benchmark and the 59th highest value in the sector (n=153). The University's career service boosts students' employability, with 100% of part-time students accessing the service going on to secure employment. Full-time students with level 3 entry qualifications are also helped into employment, those accessing the service having a 3% higher employment rate, and there are similar boosts to the employment rate of disabled students using the service (by 4%) and of students under the age of 25 (by 1%).

Wider engagement also benefits employability. For example, 18-20 year olds are particularly helped by engagement with the Students' Union, the employment rate for these students being boosted by 8%. Additional skills sessions, run as part of the Students' Union's Big Deal, also boost the employment rate of participating students by 2%. These sessions were especially helpful for students with level 3 entry qualifications, receiving a boost of 2%; BAME students (5%); disabled students (7%); 18-20 year old students (9%); and male students (7%).

Highly Skilled Employment. We believe we have an excellent record in effecting our students' transition into highly skilled employment, and especially for students who might traditionally have been excluded from higher education – see Table 6 for example.

Table 6. Highly skilled employment case study A

Student A is a white, male student from a POLAR quintile 2 area. He came to Bucks with an entry tariff of 220 points at A level, joining in 2014/15 as an 18-year-old, studying full-time on the University's BSc Air Transport with Commercial Pilot Training programme. He engaged with the Students' Union during his studies, showing a pattern of increasing library use and attendance, and heavy use of the VLE. He graduated in 2017 with a first-class degree, and successfully secured full-time, highly skilled employment as a first officer for a UK regional airline.

The University has continued to strengthen its focus on building graduate employability within the curriculum. In 2013 it introduced the 'Career Edge' Model to inform the redesign of all curricula across the institution. Embedded within new programme approval and amendment procedures in 2014, it requires all programmes to evidence how they are building employability development into the curriculum based on a 20-point reference list. It was adopted as the basis for the HEA's guidance on employability good practice in 2015.

Our employability strategy has been further developed to embed more deeply Bucks' graduate attributes within the curriculum, to target support more effectively to those students most likely to

experience challenge in the jobs market, and to boost further their employability skills. An element of the redeveloped strategy is the creation of a new Postgraduate Certificate in Business Leadership, offered at no cost to our graduates and designed to boost their skills significantly and enhance their competitiveness in the graduate jobs market. The course successfully launched during 2017/18 and has attracted an initial intake well in excess of 50 students in its first year.

Despite the successes of our strategic approach, the TEF metrics appear to show our highly skilled employment rate represents a challenge. We argue there are two principal reasons why the data substantially underestimate the University's performance.

Decision-making. First, our student body is highly diverse, reflecting our widening participation agenda. Many of our students face significant challenge both in achieving successful educational outcomes and in progressing through their chosen careers, as confirmed by the University's UKES data. For example, only 51% feel able to participate in extra-curricular activities (3% less than the sector average). 67% report having to work to earn income, 15% above sector average and placing us in the top quartile for this measure. 40% have caring responsibilities, 165 above sector average, also placing in the top quartile. We respond to these pressures by providing students with highly effective support. However, these pressures do not cease when our students graduate and enter the jobs market. While our employability figure indicates our students overwhelmingly seek and are successful in securing employment, there is evidence these pressures influence their decision-making over the kinds of job they take. The DLHE survey asks respondents to specify the main reason for choosing their current job. Among respondents, we identify two groups: 69.6% are 'career-oriented', explaining their decision-making by citing their career plan, job progression, or broadening of their experience; the remaining 30.4% are more 'opportunistic', citing factors such as levels of pay, paying off debts, job location, or wanting to see if they would like the work. While both groups have 100% employment rates, their reasons for taking employment significantly influence the nature of the employment they take. In the TEF period, the highly skilled employment rate for our 'career-oriented' students is a hugely impressive 80%, 79% for full-time, and 84% for part-time, and both figures more than 3% higher than their respective TEF benchmarks. Among this group, we also see evidence of our considerable success in supporting students from diverse backgrounds: BAME students have a highly skilled employment rate of 78%; known disability, 83%; 18-20 year olds, 81%; 25+ year olds, 87%; female, 81%; SEC 4-8, 80%.

In the TEF period, the 'opportunistic' group, even though fully employed, has a disappointing, but perhaps unsurprising highly skilled employment rate of 35%, and lower among some demographic groups: 18-20 year olds 30%; female 34%; known disability 30%; BAME 33%; SEC 4-8 32%.

That this difference relates to students' decision-making is corroborated further by the DLHE survey. Students are asked to indicate the principal means by which they had found their current job. 23% of 'career-oriented' students relied on professional networking, University contacts, and the University's careers service. Among 'opportunistic' students, this proportion fell to just 12%, relying more heavily on personal contacts, or existing relationships with an employer or agency.

We believe these data demonstrate our TEF indicator for highly skilled employment is especially impacted by the pressures facing our diverse student body. As such factors are naturally not reflected in the TEF benchmarks, we believe comparison of our indicator to the benchmark substantially underestimates our success in equipping graduates for their future careers.

Entry tariff. A second challenge faced by our students relates to entry tariff and we believe the TEF data underestimate our performance because of the significant role played by entry tariff. As a low entry tariff institution we are keenly aware that across the sector entry tariff strongly predicts highly skilled employment. Analysis of the Complete University Guide 2018, for example, shows entry tariff is strongly correlated with graduate job prospects (correlating 0.71, a figure that implies 50% of the variance in graduate jobs is explained solely by differences in entry tariff). Despite the strong influence of entry tariff across the sector, Bucks provides considerable 'added value' - securing much better rates of highly skilled employment than predicted by its entry tariff.

For students with DLHE outcomes reported in this TEF period, Figure 3 shows the distribution of entry tariff scores for Bucks and for the sector as a whole (source: HEIDI+). The skew of Bucks' entry tariff towards the low end of the distribution is very apparent.

We have analysed distributions of tariff band scores for the whole sector, considering whether the proportions within the bands shown in Figure 3 can accurately predict the highly skilled employment score for each higher education institution. The resulting regression model successfully explains a substantial amount of the observed variance (48%) in highly skilled employment across the sector. The model is illuminating, however: it predicts that, given the distribution of its entry tariff scores, Bucks should rank 146th out of 154 institutions on highly skilled employment. However, the University actually ranks 128th, implying the University is highly successful in raising the graduate prospects of its (low entry tariff) students, a testament to our strategy and our distinctive educational approach and our strong student support.

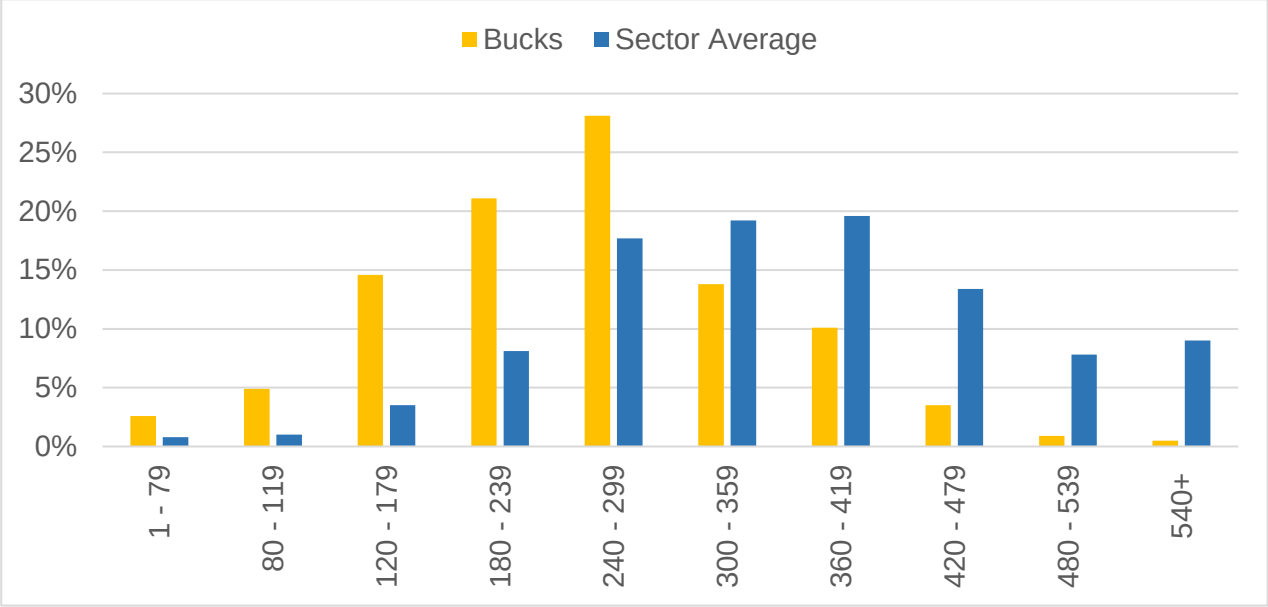

Figure 3. Percentage of students at Bucks and in the sector by entry tariff band.

We have developed a similar regression model to consider what entry tariff would be predicted for Bucks given its performance in highly skilled employment. This model indicates the University is performing as if its entry tariff in the TEF period were 305 as opposed to its actual tariff of 247. In other words, because of the successful work of the University in securing highly skilled employment for its students, it is as if our students had each received a boost to their entry profile of some 60 tariff points – a student at Bucks with an entry profile of three C grades at A level, for example, actually achieves a highly skilled employment rate commensurate with having entered with three B grades instead. This boost to our students' success directly results from the University's strategically informed approach to the education of its students, deeply embedding within its curricula employment-focused and practical learning.

Given this analysis, it is reasonable to question why the strong and successful performance of the University is not more evident within the TEF metrics. The answer we believe derives from the fact that TEF benchmarks highly skilled employment by dividing entry tariff into four groups: groups for those with an existing HE qualification; those with no tariff; those with a profile of ABB+ (320+); and a group for students with tariffs in the range 0-319. In effect, the wide distribution shown in Figure 3 is reduced to just 2 groups. Within the ABB+ (320+) group, inspection of Figure 3 shows that Bucks students will be compared in this benchmarking process to students across the sector with generally much higher entry tariffs. Given the significance of entry tariff in predicting highly skilled employment across the sector, this comparison will inevitably lead to the (erroneous) conclusion that Bucks is not as successful at securing highly skilled employment for its students as the benchmark. In other words, applying this benchmark will necessarily underestimate the University's

performance. Similar arguments apply for students within the 0-320 tariff group.

The TEF LEO supplementary metrics also give support to the argument that many of our students' initial job choice is opportunistic as their sustained employment and earnings are within benchmark three years after graduation. Though our part-time students show a negative flag for sustained employment, we note from the TEF specification document that these data do not yet include data from self-assessment tax records, which is likely to be of particular significance to students who opt for part-time study. Moreover, these part-time data are not benchmarked for entry tariff, which we have argued above is a significant factor in understanding employability outcomes. Our analysis of data at 1 year from qualification shows the University's sustained employment indicator (82%) exceeds the sector, once comparisons are made for each subject and within the same tariff group.

4.2 Employability and Transferable Skills (SO2)

The practical, real-world nature of our learning and teaching provides students with unparalleled opportunities to cultivate skills valuable to employers, as students themselves report. Within the NSS, for example, students' evaluations of their personal development show Bucks consistently equals or exceeds the sector average (see Table 7). Students are highly satisfied with the opportunities provided in their course to apply their learning, with 84% satisfaction reported in NSS 2017, compared to the sector average of 81%; and students believe the practical activities on their course have helped them to learn (81% at Bucks compared to 79% for the sector). In our module evaluation survey, 91% agree that their module has provided opportunities to apply their learning.

Table 7. NSS Personal Development

NSS Theme/Question	Bucks (TEF period)	Sector (2016)
Personal Development	83%	82%
The course has helped me to present myself with confidence.	83%	81%
My communication skills have improved.	85%	84%
As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems.	82%	82%

88% of students say they believe their course has improved their career prospects, compared to the sector average of 87% (NSS 2017). We examine students' assessment of their own skill development through UKES which shows Bucks outperforms the sector for the acquisition of employability skills (1% above sector average), for learning the skill of speaking clearly and effectively (2% above). Bucks is also above average for the acquisition of creative and social skills, such as working effectively with others (3% above), understanding people of other backgrounds (3% above), and being innovative and creative (0.3% above).

4.3 Positive Outcomes for All (SO3)

We are proud of our record in supporting students into employment and highly skilled employment, especially so for students who traditionally may face disadvantage – see Table 8 for example.

Table 8. Highly skilled employment case study B

Student B is a BAME, female student with a disability and from a POLAR quintile 1 area. She came to Bucks with an entry tariff of 220 points at A level, and was accepted on our BSc Product Design course. During her studies she engaged with the Student's Union and with our disability services, showing a pattern of increasing attendance and VLE use. She graduated in 2015/16 with a lower second class degree and within 6 months had secured full-time, highly skilled employment, as a product designer for Origin, a manufacturer and design company.

Our highly skilled employment rate for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (SEC 4-8) exceeds that of those from higher socio-economic background (SEC1-3) by 1.5%. The highly skilled employment rate for our BAME students, according to the TEF metrics, is 3.4% higher than the University average. For our female students, highly skilled employment exceeds the University average by 3.9%; the rate for disabled students exceeds the University average by 2.0%; and the highly skilled employment rate for our mature students (25+) is a hugely impressive 79.4%.

Our data show that our students' prospects are significantly boosted by accessing the careers service and by wider engagement across the University, and we see this for a number of groups that might be at risk of disadvantage. For example, accessing the careers service boosts the highly skilled employment rate of 18-20 year olds by 15.0%. Additional skills sessions run by the Students' Union as part of the Big Deal boost the highly skilled employment rate of lower socio-economic class students (SEC 4-8) by 25.7%, by 7.4% for those with level 3 entry qualifications, by 19.2% for disabled students, by 11.6% for female students, and by 39.7% for 18-20 year olds. Of those students with a disability who remained in contact with the disability service throughout their programme, a hugely impressive 100% achieved highly skilled employment.

5 Summary

Since our founding, our historic mission has been to transform lives through employment-focused and skills-based teaching, and we are proud to have one of the most diverse student bodies in the sector. To fulfil our mission, we have crafted a distinctive approach to education, one rooted in employment-focused and practical learning. We provide high intensity teaching in small, interactive classes that promote a genuine community of students and staff, forms of assessment closely linked with our industrial partners, high quality and supportive feedback, coupled with outstanding student support and an environment and unique partnership with the Students' Union that encourages high levels of student engagement. The importance of teaching to the institution is embedded in our academic framework and system of awards and recognition. We maintain rigorous standards, with glowing endorsement from our external examiners.

Reflecting our strategic approach, academic performance has risen, supported by a strong personal tutor model, and increased engagement with our learning and teaching infrastructure, the wider University environment and support services. These are highly effective at meeting the needs of different kinds of learner, supporting all to achieve the highest standards of success.

The University's curriculum embeds skills valuable to employers and our employment outcomes are outstanding, as are our highly skilled employment outcomes once the importance of entry tariff and the challenges faced by our diverse student body are understood. Students who need to take employment opportunistically on graduation achieve sustained employment and salary levels equal to benchmark. Students of all backgrounds who are career-oriented from the point of graduation are supported by the University in achieving exceptional levels of highly skilled employment.

These achievements are founded on a strategically informed, distinctive and highly successful style of education. They are built on a strong sense of community, one that supports and engages students throughout their educational journey, equipping them with skills and success for life.

Student Engagement in the Submission

The University's Council and Executive work in close and productive partnership with Bucks Students' Union, who endorse the content of this TEF submission and have been fully involved in its preparation, being members of the University's TEF Steering Group. Bucks Students' Union have prepared the following additional statement.

"We are proud to continue working closely with the University in improving the quality of the opportunities we provide for our students and to further support their retention, progression and future success. We are delighted that our contributions to the university's TEF submission have been fully considered and reflected in the narrative."