Name of Provider: **Durham University**
UKPRN: **1007143**

I. Mission and Vision

1. Durham University is a multi-disciplinary, research-intensive, collegiate university. Our mission is to prepare today's students for tomorrow's challenges and opportunities. At the heart of a Durham education is research. Every student participates in a sequence of classroom, laboratory and real-world experiences, which enable them not simply to understand the world as it is, but to answer questions that have yet to be asked. Enquiry-based learning empowers Durham students to learn teamwork and communication, providing a platform for broader, student-led skills development. Participation in collegiate and co-curricular programs promotes leadership, empathy and resilience. Progressive challenges and opportunities facilitate growth and development.
2. Durham's educational vision is to produce graduates who will change the world: critically engaged global citizens capable of, and dedicated to, a life of learning, leadership, innovation and service. Our graduates are the measure of our success. Outstanding metrics for further study, for salary, and for highly-skilled and long-term employment demonstrate the enduring value of a Durham degree.
3. To maintain focus on our mission and vision, we engage in overlapping cycles of reflection, innovation and analysis. This pattern can be found in the teaching of every module, and informs every department and faculty. It means partnering with our students, working with our Students' Union, Departmental Student-Staff Committees, College Common Rooms, and with our students as individuals. At key moments it leads to institutional change. For example, in 2011, the drive to embed research in every course led to the adoption of *Principles for the Development of the Taught Curriculum* (*Principles*). The recently adopted *University Strategy 2017-2027* (*Strategy*), in turn, reflects a desire to comprehensively address the needs of diverse students, and to fully engage pedagogical innovations made possible by digital technology. In the last twelve months we have broken ground on an innovative £40M Teaching and Learning Centre, brought academic and student support staff together in an integrated Centre for Academic Development, and adopted an ambitious plan for improving access.
4. This submission explores evidence concerning Durham's fulfilment of this mission and vision. It begins with a discussion of strengths and weaknesses revealed by data and metrics (sections II - III); and then explores strategic actions and investments that have contributed to our outstanding educational outcomes (sections IV - VI).

II. Impact

5. The impact of a Durham education is recognised in league tables and international rankings. We are currently ranked 6th in the *Complete University Guide*, 5th in the *Times Good University Guide* 2018, and 4th in both the *Guardian University Guide 2018* and the THE's *2018 Table of Tables*. Globally, we are 96th in the *Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2016/17*, and 78th in the *QS World University Rankings 2017/2018*. In NSS2017, our overall student satisfaction was 89.48%, the 10th highest satisfaction in the sector.[1]
6. Our retention and employment rates are outstanding. Our positively flagged retention rate is 97.6%, putting it within the top 5% in the UK for each of the last three years. And while numbers are small (153), we have a double positive flag for part-time student retention, where we are 17.9 percentage points above the benchmark, with positive flags for every reportable disadvantaged and under-represented student group.
7. 94.1% of our students are in employment after 6 months, and 83.3% are in highly-skilled employment. Our flag in the core metric for highly-skilled employment is supported by a positive flag for every under-represented student group. Indeed, each group is at least 4.3 percentage points above benchmark, with noticeably stronger performances amongst the most under-represented groups. We are 7.4, 7.9, and 8.1 percentage points above benchmark for IMD Q1-Q2, BME, and POLAR Q1-Q2 students respectively.

[1] Defined throughout as amongst all HEIs, excluding small and specialist providers (121 institutions in 2017).

8. These positive core metric flags are supported by supplementary metrics measuring longitudinal outcomes. We are in the top 10% of all providers for both sustained employment and earnings, with a double positive flag for the latter, where we are 7 percentage points above benchmark. This is mirrored by the most recent Longitudinal DLHE survey, which measured employment rates of students who completed their studies in 2012/2013. Three years after graduation, Durham alumni had the highest levels of employment (97.9%) of any UK provider.

9. Our students rate our teaching and assessment very positively. In NSS2017, we were ranked 8th in the sector for the Teaching domain (88%), and 12th for Assessment and Feedback (77%). In the TEF Assessment & Feedback metric (74.8%), we are 1.9 percentage points above benchmark (significantly so, with a z score of +3.9). Our development work in this area has brought significant improvements, and we gained positive and double positive flags in the Year Two and Year Three splits for this metric. Our performance in the TEF Teaching metric (89.1%) is 1 percentage point above benchmark (significantly so, with a z score of +2.7), but the narrow interquartile range (less than four percentage points amongst all HEIs in 2017) makes it very difficult to exceed our benchmark by the two percentage points required for a positive flag.

10. When comparing to benchmarks, our metrics show a consistent pattern of success for students from under-represented or disadvantaged groups (particularly BME students), who are more satisfied with teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support, and who typically have comparatively higher rates of progression to employment and further study (cf. 21, 27, 80).

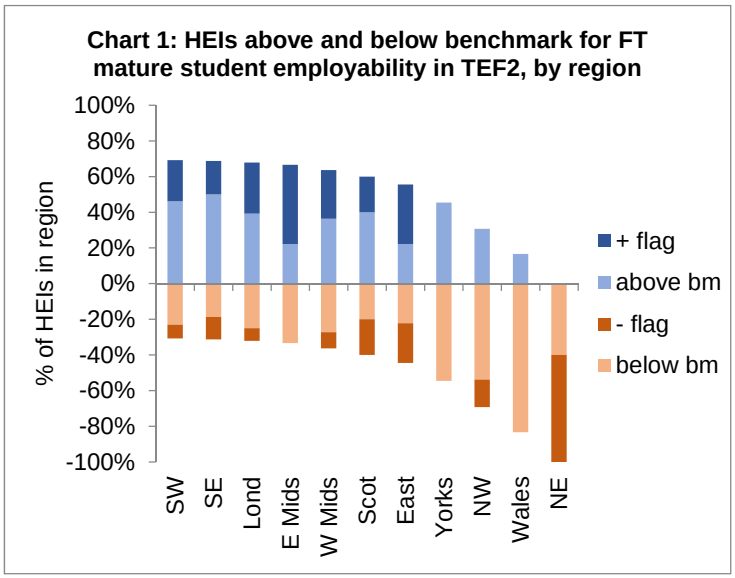
III. Contextual Information on the Metrics

11. The TEF metrics highlight three areas where our internal analysis has identified specific challenges: mature student (short-term) employability, mature student continuation, and part time employability. Findings from our analysis, and the action we have taken, is summarised below. Support for mature students, in particular, remains a key area of focus, and initiatives which we have put in place have had considerable impact: we are confident that performance in this area has improved, is improving and will continue to improve.

Mature Student Employability

12. The regional labour market in North East England presents particular short-term challenges for our mature students. The contextual employment heat maps show that the North East contains areas with some of the lowest rates of employment in the country, and the ONS consistently ranks it as the region with the lowest employment and highest unemployment in England, Scotland and Wales.[2] This is a challenging environment for employability (particularly in the short term), and is reflected in North East HEIs' performance in TEF for mature students.

13. **Chart 1**, right, shows TEF 2 performance against benchmark for Mature Student Employability, for all 126 HEIs with reportable metrics. All 5 North Eastern HEIs were below benchmark, and 3 were negatively flagged. These proportions are not replicated for any other region: the North East has more HEIs with negative flags than London, despite London's 28 institutions in TEF2, compared to the North East's 5.



14. Our mature students are much more likely to have come from, and remain in, the region. Internal surveys put the North East as the destination of

[2]ONS, Regional Labour Market Bulletins 2015-2017

choice for 60% of our outgoing mature students, and the 2017 High Fliers survey puts the same figure for all Durham graduates at 4%. And short-term DLHE for mature students is our only negative flag for employability: we are above benchmark for POLAR Q1-Q2, IMD Q1-Q2 and BME students – the latter by 1.5 percentage points.

15. Despite short term challenges, long-term outcomes for Durham's mature students are extremely positive. Our analysis of the 2012-13 longitudinal DLHE data shows that 100% of identifiable mature students were employed or in further study after three years; all of the mature students who had been unemployed in the initial DLHE survey were in highly-skilled employment three years later.

16. To alleviate the short-term challenges faced by our mature students, we have established a suite of interventions, drawing on the expertise of our Foundation Centre, which offers non-traditional students an alternative route into the University. Over the last four years, we have adopted an integrated pre-arrival program to prepare mature students for induction, launched an Academic Skills Programme (cf. 64) designed to support academic excellence among students who have had limited opportunity to prepare for the rigours of higher education, and introduced tailored support for future employment from entry onwards through our Careers, Employability and Enterprise Centre, and through dedicated college activity.

17. These initiatives are having a measurable impact on both degree outcomes and employability for mature students. The attainment gap, which was over 25% in 2012-13, has closed significantly; the proportion of mature students gaining 2:1s or better is now within 5% of the Durham average. DLHE data reveals that mature student employment rates have risen year-on-year, from 80.8% in 2012-13 to 89.4% in 2015-16. Highly-skilled employment rates for mature students have followed a similar trajectory, from 72.7% to 83.3%; we are now +4.3 percentage points above benchmark for mature students, resulting in a positive flag.

18. Analysis of internal data indicates that a significant factor in short-term employment outcomes has been course location. In 2016, we consolidated all courses at our main Durham campus (previously, several departments had offered courses at both Durham and Stockton campuses), and all courses and students will be based at Durham by 2018. Resources will no longer be split across two sites, enabling support to be targeted more efficiently and effectively. DLHE 2015-16 results support this decision: of the 7 mature students who were not in further study or employment, 5 were graduates of Stockton-based courses; the rate of employability for mature graduates from Durham-based courses was 93.8%, in line with our benchmark.

Mature Student Continuation

19. In addition to the initiatives for mature students in general, we have introduced specific support through our Foundation Centre, which has a lower rate of continuation for mature students. Unlike most other HEIs, we treat the foundation year as an integral part of the course of study, not as a standalone course. "In this respect," one external examiner observed in 2016, "Durham is not directly comparable with other institutions." Our approach permits initial provision to be tailored to the requirements of each of our courses, and facilitates integration of foundation students into the wider community. It is better for our students, but it also means that, unusually, the progression of foundation students into year one of a BA/BSc influences our institutional continuation rates. This is especially significant when attention is focused on mature students, one-third of whom are recruited through the Foundation Centre (when Foundation Centre students are excluded from the calculation, our rate of continuation for mature students is 89.1%, in line with our benchmark).

20. The relatively small size of the Foundation Centre mature student cohort (on average 90 students, 0.7% of the student body) means that we have been able to introduce more tailored support in three ways: by developing a more sophisticated admissions process, allowing us to better assess the varied support needs of students who typically have not taken A-levels; by introducing a suite of formative assessments very early in the first term to permit early interventions with students facing difficulties; and by revising modules in the foundation year to more precisely match the demands of specific programmes of study. We have also made

structural changes to the Foundation Centre itself, with the aim of ensuring that resources can be deployed to best effect. All Foundation Centre courses are now delivered at Durham's main campus (the centre having previously operated across two sites), and the Centre now only recruits UK students (enabling support to be tailored further).

21. Evidence provided by the latest NSS suggests that our targeted actions to enhance support for mature students (as outlined above) have been well received. Mature students are more satisfied than younger students, in absolute terms and compared to our benchmarks:

NSS TEF Metric	Indicator		Indicator - Benchmark	
	Young	Mature	Young	Mature
Teaching on My Course	89.0	90.8	+0.9	+3.4
Assessment & Feedback	74.6	78.3	+1.9	+2.4
Academic Support	81.7	83.0	-0.3	+1.6

Part-Time Student Employability

22. The number of students considered in our part-time employability metric is just 16 across three years (0.13% of our student body); the negative flag is the result of 3 students being unemployed (had 2 of these students gained employment, we would have outperformed our benchmark). Most of our part-time students study on our BSc Accounting, and the majority of these students move to an accelerated rate of study in the final year, and are therefore classed as full time for the DLHE employability metric. This accounts for the difference between our denominators for part-time continuation and employability, and has a major impact on our part-time employability metric. Had our BSc Accounting students (who were part-time for all but the final stage of their studies) been included, our employment rate would have been 95.6% (2.2 percentage points above benchmark), with a highly-skilled employment rate of 92.6%. With Accounting students excluded, the majority of our remaining DLHE part-time students are former full-time students who have been permitted to complete their course on a part-time basis due to challenging personal or medical circumstances. The nature of this cohort creates employment challenges which are particularly acute in the short term. But evidence from the 2012-13 longitudinal DLHE suggests that long-term prospects for all remain outstanding, as all identifiable part-time graduates were in highly-skilled employment three years after graduating.

IV. Teaching Quality

Teaching provides effective stimulation, challenge and contact time that encourages students to engage and actively commit to their studies.

23. Durham's transformative *Principles*, introduced in 2011, sought to "empower all to learn and develop to their full potential." The *Principles* are a key reference point in course design, approval and review. They conceive of a Durham degree as a programme of study with a strong discipline-specific spine, from which radiates a wide range of curricular and co-curricular educational opportunities. Between 2011 and 2015, all programmes of study were revised in line with four key goals: research-informed education, inter- and multi-disciplinarity, internationalisation and employability.

24. At the disciplinary level, Durham degrees emphasise the power of progressive challenges, with a focus on independent and active learning which begins before students arrive. All courses begin with a pre-induction Transitions programme which serves as an introduction to education at Durham (95% of incoming undergraduates engaged in 2016), and requires students to undertake a Skills Audit (cf. 67) to assess their perceived areas of strength and weakness. This is the starting point for the development of students as disciplinary researchers. Each level of the curriculum places incrementally greater emphasis on small group learning and one-to-one interaction with research-active staff, culminating in a capstone research project (40-60 credits) undertaken by every student.

25. In partnership with our students, who have stressed the importance of course flexibility and student choice, we enhanced the role of optionality within and beyond the degree course. Within every degree, students can now choose to study language, entrepreneurship and multi-

disciplinary modules, and can elect to undertake an additional year abroad or integrated placement. Take-up of each of these opportunities has increased significantly (cf. 63).

26. Our students' support for these reforms on student engagement is particularly visible in our performance in the new and revised questions in NSS2017. We rank in the 1st quartile in both the Teaching (88%) and Learning Opportunities (90%) domains; on the key questions that measure engagement – *Q3. The course is intellectually stimulating* (90%) and Q5. *My course has provided me with opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth* (91%) – we are 2nd overall.

27. Since 2010, students and staff have worked together in two cross-cutting groups – on Curriculum Diversity and Inclusive Learning – to implement targeted changes to improve outcomes for all. These resulted in changes to, for example, regulations for inclusive curriculum development (2013), standardisation of the learning environment at a modular level (2015), and the introduction of lecture capture (2016). The impact of this focus on inclusive teaching can be seen in our metrics, showing that students from disadvantaged groups are consistently highly satisfied with Teaching:

Group	Material Difference	Z Score
Mature Students	+3.4	+1.9
POLAR Q1-Q2 Students	+1.7	+1.4
IMD Q1-Q2 Students	+1.7	+1.5
BME Students	+2.0	+2.1
Students with Known Disability	+1.3	+1.2

***An institutional culture that facilitates, recognises and rewards excellent teaching*.**

28. We are a research-intensive institution committed to fostering teaching excellence, and our academic staff, all of whom teach, are core to the outstanding education received by our students. We want all staff to have their practice informed by pedagogical training, and to use in their teaching the same cycle of reflection, innovation and analysis that the University uses in formulating educational policy. Engagement with training in teaching and learning is an expectation of both probation and promotion for all staff.

29. We have extremely high levels of staff engagement with internal and external training, particularly when compared to other research-intensive institutions. We offer three courses aligned with the HEA's UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF), aimed at new and experienced staff and research students. 2015-16 HESA data for England shows that 63% of Durham staff hold teaching qualifications, the 6th highest proportion amongst (55) pre-92 institutions, the 4th highest if small and specialist providers are excluded, and the 2nd highest in the Russell Group. Similarly, the most recent sector data on HEA fellowships shows that 39% of staff have at least Associate Fellowship of the HEA, the 12th highest proportion amongst pre-92 institutions, the 10th excluding specialists, and the 2nd in the Russell Group. Our staff take teaching seriously. In a recent academic staff survey, 40% of respondents indicated that they had recently undertaken training and 45% expected to undertake training in the near future.

30. This commitment to training is shared by our postgraduate researchers who support teaching. The 2015 and 2017 biennial Postgraduate Research Experience Surveys (PRES) show very high levels of research student engagement with training for teaching and assessment: 88% in both years, comfortably (by 10 to 19 percentage points) within the 1st quartile for the sector, and amongst pre-92 and Russell Group institutions.

31. Engagement makes our staff better teachers, and our students more satisfied with teaching, as demonstrated by our NSS results for Teaching. Engagement also facilitates the sharing of good practice, and pedagogic advances. We support three teaching-focused groups which developed from our training programmes. Our Learning and Teaching Network runs termly events and the internal annual learning and teaching conference, currently focused on inclusive teaching and teaching quality. The Teaching Focused Academic Network represents the voice and views of teaching track staff, with termly development events and an annual external conference series, "Enhancing Student Learning Through Innovative Scholarship". The Pedagogical Practice Group provides mentoring for writing and publishing for those involved

directly in innovative practice, including pedagogical research and the scholarship of teaching and learning, and meets monthly to support the development of reports and papers. These groups lead innovation in teaching and learning at Durham, which in turn will be driven forward by our new Centre for Academic Development.

32. Processes for monitoring, recognising and reviewing teaching quality have been revised significantly since 2014. Courses are now monitored through a metric-informed annual teaching review which feeds into departmental planning. At the individual level, teaching is reviewed annually through our centrally-administered Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQ), and departmental Peer Review processes which apply to all teaching staff, including research students. We expect teaching to be excellent and when issues are identified – at an individual or wider level – we work with teachers and departments to determine the best strategy for improving the learning experience, drawing on the expertise of our National Teaching Fellows and internal award winners. At the same time, annual monitoring and student feedback have a clear role in promotion and reward: in a 2017 staff survey, three quarters of all staff respondents agreed that excellent teaching was recognised at Durham.

33. We operate three institutional schemes for excellence in teaching; two reward outstanding current practice, as identified by our students, and one provides project funding for innovation and enhancement in scholarship. Our *Excellence in Learning and Teaching* and *Excellence in Supervision* awards were begun over a decade ago. These student-nominated and judged awards recognise and reward staff who have made an outstanding contribution to learning and teaching at Durham; annual awards have a value of £9,000, which can be shared between staff and their departments. These prizes are complemented by our *Enhancing the Student Learning Experience* (EtSLE) awards, which were introduced in 2005. Each year a student-staff committee, chaired by the PVC Education, funds projects that will transform the educational experience. Individuals and small groups may receive up to £7,000, while large scale initiatives may receive up to £35,000.

34. Our awards are highly sought after; in the last three years we have rewarded 67 individuals and groups. Particularly successful EtSLE projects – such as the Transitions programme (cf. 58) – have been rolled out across the University. Award winners are involved in staff training and induction; awards are a clear reference point in promotion, where attainment in teaching forms a core criterion for all academic staff, and where performance against that criterion is acknowledged and supported. To ensure full recognition of the contribution of all staff, we introduced a new career track, “teaching professor”. Benchmarked against the HEA framework, this teaching and scholarship path has parity of esteem with the traditional teaching/research track, and has grown rapidly: three years ago we had 111 teaching fellows; we now have 127 teaching professors. More significant, however, has been the increase in the number and proportion of staff promoted to the highest levels, from 10 Senior or Principal Fellows and 1 Professorial Fellow in 2014, to 21 Associate Professors (Teaching) and 4 Professors (Teaching) in 2017. Outstanding teaching is supported and recognised, and our outstanding teachers are retained and rewarded.

Course design, development, standards and assessment are effective in stretching students to develop independence, knowledge, understanding and skills that reflect their full potential.

35. A Durham degree is challenging by design. Our courses stretch our students, who leave the University with the skills and abilities they will need to thrive in the future. Our internal qualification descriptors – key reference points, alongside our *Principles*, for course approval and review – exceed the minimum expectations of the national Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ), with a specific emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge and the development of research and independent study skills. The high quality of our courses is explicitly recognised by the 36 Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) which accredit Durham’s provision, two of whom are now active partners in co-designed courses.

36. Improvements we have made in the consistency of marking and the provision of feedback mean that our students gain more from their learning (as evidenced by continuous improvements in our NSS scores for assessment and feedback in particular), and we have

seen significant improvements in attainment from under-represented groups over the same period (for example, the proportion of 1sts/2:1s for POLAR 1-2 students is consistently within 3-4% of the average, and outcomes for students with known disabilities are directly comparable). In NSS2017, our positive score for the new Q*4. My course has challenged me to achieve my best work* (83%) compared favourably with universities with similar student intakes; it was the 3rd highest score in the Russell Group, and 2nd amongst institutions which consistently take 'high tariff' students.[3]

37. Challenging degrees are accompanied by rigorous assessments. Our degree regulations do not permit any resits beyond the second year of study; modules can be resat on one occasion only; and resit marks are capped at the pass mark (40). Three major changes to our degree regulations over the last 10 years have made our degrees more demanding: we have increased internal progression hurdles on integrated master's degrees; we now require a greater proportion of credits to be undertaken at Levels 5 and 6; and we have reduced the scope for the use of academic discretion.

38. Our high standards are consistently confirmed by our external examiners, and by our Chief Examiner, a senior academic (most recently a former PVC Education from a top-20 UK University) who reviews all classification decisions. In our 2016-17 overview, 100% of external examiners confirmed that academic standards at Durham were comparable with those of similar courses and the requirements of the national FHEQ. Within free text comments, three-quarters of our external examiners praised the high quality of students' work, and 9% advised our staff to mark more generously. Our Chief External Examiner commented in 2016 that:

> *Durham University has high expectations of itself as an institution and of its staff and students in their teaching and learning. In so far as the achievement of these strategic objectives is measured by examinations and other assessments, it is clear to me that it is meeting its expectations. Regulations, structures and processes are sound and are clearly in line with national and international norms and requirements. In many cases the base-line expectations are* ***significantly exceeded****.*

The changing profile of attainment

39. The proportion of 1sts and 2:1s awarded at Durham has increased from 78% in 2007-08, to 91% in 2016-17, with the proportion of 1sts rising from 18% to 31% over the same period. We are committed to maintaining standards, and we monitor degree classifications alongside key internal and external reference points. We believe our awards reflect the quality of our students and their education at Durham. This view is supported by analysis of all available metrics, and the evidence of external examiners who consistently commend the rigour of Durham degrees (cf. 38).

40. Between 2007-08 and 2015-16 our proportion of 1sts/2:1s awarded increased by 12 percentage points, below both the median HEI and mean for all students (+12.2 and +12.3 percentage points respectively). Rising attainment of our students follows extensive and ongoing work to improve the quality of education at Durham, strategically driven by the *Principles* and the *Strategy*, which we have outlined throughout this submission. Increased student attainment across the sector has also come at a time of enhanced student engagement and commitment to their studies, partly in light of significant fee increases. As the OfS Chair puts it, 'contemporary students are the best educated generation our country has ever seen'.[4]

41. Our awards are appropriate in the context of our students and their abilities. According to the most recent HESA data (2015-16), we award the 10th highest proportion of 1sts/2:1s, and the 18th highest proportion of 1sts, within the sector, when non-classified degrees (e.g. medical degrees, enhanced degrees with distinction, Scottish general degrees) are excluded from the calculations. At the same time, HESA data also shows that we have consistently had the 4th-5th highest entry tariff in the sector since 2010. We admit exceptional students, and strive to bring out the best in each and every one of them.

[3] Average tariff of 390+, as per 2017 *TEF Framework Specification* (p.21) definition of a high tariff student.
[4] *Securing student success… Government consultation on behalf of the Office for Students* (2017), p. 4.

42. The achievements of our graduates are widely recognised as outstanding. Our metrics show that we are significantly above benchmark for highly-skilled employability, and within the top 10% of all providers. Our LEO data is similarly extremely positive, and we have the highest proportion of graduates employed or in further study after 3 years in the sector, according to the 2012-13 Longitudinal DLHE survey. Employers and postgraduate recruiters value the outstanding knowledge and skills of Durham graduates.

***Assessment and feedback are used effectively in supporting students' development, progression and attainment*.**

43. Starting with the *Principles* in 2011, and continuing with a recently launched reform of all programmes of study, Durham has promoted innovative and diverse approaches to feedback and assessment. We are preparing students for the future, and want them to be capable of a life of learning, innovation and leadership when they graduate. For this reason we place special emphasis on research-led teaching, and on forms of feedback and assessment that cultivate critical reflection and broad understanding.

44. Drawing on educational research, we have introduced a structured approach to feedback and assessment. We have consciously avoided setting specific institutional deadlines (e.g. all feedback in 2 weeks) or specific formats or templates. Instead, deadlines are set in the context of the learning, teaching and assessment strategy for the individual course, and are therefore dictated by how the feedback will be used and what it will feed forward into, thus maximising the benefit to students. Following our 2015-16 student-led feedback review, we established additional guidelines for pedagogically appropriate instant feedback (where, for example, handwritten notes are used to provide immediate feedback on work assessed during fieldtrips), and institution-wide, student-specific feedback timetables: all students are provided with information on when each piece feedback will be returned to them, and adherence to agreed deadlines is subsequently monitored at programme and institutional levels.

45. As a consequence of these innovations, our NSS results for assessment and feedback have improved consistently over the last five years, from 71% in 2013 to 75.6% in 2017. Our improved performance against benchmark led to positive flags in our TEF3 metrics, with a double positive flag for BME students, and a ranking of 12th within the sector in NSS2017. Students are not the only ones to have noticed these improvements. The provision of feedback was once a common concern raised by our externals: 14% in 2013, 12% in 2014. In 2016 this figure fell to 3%, while 41% used their free text comments to explicitly praise the quality of feedback provided to students. We have seen a similar shift in external judgments regarding the diversity of assessments undertaken by our students.

46. Innovations in teaching and learning – especially the increasing use of digital technologies – profoundly challenge received practices. As part of the University's *Strategy,* we are currently using student and staff focus groups to review online assessment and feedback. The recently launched Durham Centre for Academic Development will host campus-wide workshops promoting continuous improvement in this area.

V. Learning Resources

47. The Learning Environment plays a crucial role in the development of graduates who have outstanding long-term career prospects. Working collaboratively with students and staff, we are continually enhancing that environment through a series of strategically-driven investments: upgrading specialist disciplinary-level provision, expanding libraries and e-learning facilities, and enhancing support structures and the wider educational environment.

***Physical and digital resources are used effectively to aid students' learning and the development of independent study and research skills*.**

48. In every discipline students have direct access to, and make ready use of, research laboratories, collaborative work spaces, museum collections, historical archives and specialist equipment. These resources are crucial to the development of Durham students as life-long learners. Between 2012 and 2017 we invested £90m in new teaching and learning spaces; a further £100m will be spent by 2020; and between 2014 and 2017 we invested over £6.5m

enhancing existing learning environments. This has yielded positive results, and been recognised by students. In NSS2017, for *Q20. I have been able to access course-specific resources (e.g. equipment, facilities, software, collections) when I needed to*, our score of 89% is our highest for this question, and puts us 22nd in the sector. Our most recent results in the global Student Barometer Survey (undertaken biennially by our home and international students) show that we continue to have very high levels of satisfaction with Physical Laboratories and Learning Spaces (94.5% and 91.0% respectively, both 1st quartile).

49. Our digital infrastructure has been developed in collaboration with both students and staff. Following a major review of e-Learning in 2013, we have focused on access to, engagement with, and standardisation of, digital resources. Between 2013-14 and 2015-16, over £2.5m was spent on collaborative and learning technology systems, mobile app developments, and wifi access, which resulted in rising student satisfaction. The 2015 Student Barometer saw student satisfaction with technology (92.7%) and virtual learning (89.5%) improve dramatically by 3.1 and 1.0 percentage points respectively; we had been ranked in the third quartile for wifi accessibility, but rose to be ranked 2nd globally (and 1st in the UK) with a satisfaction score of 88.5%. That year, the then President of the Durham Student Union commented that "recent work…such as wireless campus and [the Blackboard] mobile app, have had a hugely positive impact on students." The mobile app is now used by over 70% of staff and students, with more than 6,000 unique users per day. High levels of satisfaction continue: in December 2017, we were named the top university in the UK for on-campus wifi according to JISC. We continue to build on this investment and our success. Working in partnership with our students, we have invested £1.8m in a state-of-the-art, enhanced lecture capture system.

50. Following extensive and ongoing student consultation, the University has invested significantly in physical and electronic library resources, and in student study space. In 2012, the University invested £20m to extend and refurbish the main Library, increasing the footprint by approximately 42%, with over 2,000 individual and group study spaces. A further £14m has since been invested in our central Palace Green Library, an award-winning, world-class archive, exhibition and study space, and in significant improvements to Durham's three other libraries. These central libraries are complemented by departmental facilities, and 40 library and learning spaces within colleges.

51. By monitoring student use, and seeking student feedback, we ensure that the learning environment is responsive to student need. We also engage students directly in provision by, for example, improving accessibility of our collections. Our targeted digitisations of museum artefacts are complemented by undergraduate student-produced podcasts relating to objects in our four archive collections of national or international significance.

52. Significant, regular and increasing investment (currently, over £4m per year) has been made in the print and electronic resources (over 2.3m items) required to support the University's research-led teaching. We know that those resources are well used by our students, with over 7 million e-journal and e-book downloads in 2015-16 alone (421.6 downloads per student FTE). Excluding renewals, we averaged 19.74 unique loans per FTE in 2015-16. As in previous years, this was significantly higher than the sector (12.75) and Russell Group (14.53) averages. To ensure that students can maximise the benefits of these resources, Library staff deliver over 250 training sessions to over 9000 students annually, and over 98% of students report improved confidence in making use of resources following the training.

53. NSS results show significant continuous improvement in relation to library provision over time, with satisfaction rising from the low 80s in 2009, to 90% for each of the last four years. In NSS2017 we were ranked 18th nationally for *Q19. The library resources (e.g. books, online services and learning spaces) have supported my learning well*. Globally, we have retained high satisfaction in the Student Barometer for the physical library (91.2%, 1st quartile), and the biennial Library Quality (LibQual) survey shows that, since 2013, while student expectations for the library at Durham have risen, student satisfaction with both the library and library services has increased.

The learning environment is enriched by student exposure to and involvement in provision at the forefront of scholarship, research and/or professional practice.

54. A research-led education is crucial to the preparation of our students for the workplace and for further study. We emphasise 'learning by doing', systematic analysis and practical problem-solving. Our students develop intellectual capabilities beyond the classroom, and a capacity for independent learning, and creative and critical thinking. Our highly employable – and highly employed – graduates leave with confidence, motivation, and advanced team-working skills.

55. As a research-intensive institution, we have a long tradition of research-led education (used broadly to encompass research-based, research-oriented and research-informed learning). Our students work in departments where 83% of research, and 98% of the research environment, is internationally excellent or world-leading (REF2014). Our students are taught by outstanding researchers, and exposed to cutting-edge ideas and methodologies, from the outset of their studies. With the 2011 introduction of our *Principles,* we took the strategic decision, following consultation with employers on those attributes considered most valuable in our graduates (cf. 67), to make research-led education core to all programmes. This maximises the advantages of Durham's research environment, inextricably linking research and education to ensure that all students gain tangible benefit from studying in a world-leading, research-intensive university.

56. Drawing on an extensive body of literature, we conceptualised research-led education as a partnership between staff and students. Both are active participants in an academic community of practice, and both are committed to supporting the development of students as active researchers, as they move from guided to independent learning over the course of their studies. A Durham education gives as much attention to research processes as to research findings, with the research experiences of academic staff integrated into student learning activities. This vision sets the student at the centre of the learning experience, and directly links the skills of independent learning with the core attributes and skills that the University expects its graduates to be able to demonstrate to prospective employers.

57. Through the *Principles*, this conception of research-led education was introduced into course development, approval and review. All courses were evaluated and amended between 2011 and 2013, with individual departments taking action in the manner most appropriate to their discipline and the community(ies) of practice to which they belong. All courses articulate, within core course documentation, a discipline-specific approach to research-led education. This is tested through programme approval, and again through review: consideration of research-led teaching is at the heart of our annual and periodic review processes, which look in particular at how departments link research and education to the benefit of both, with recommendations for change made where the potential for improvement is identified.

58. Research is therefore a coherent, progressive and explicit strand at all stages of each undergraduate course, beginning at Level 4 (and, where taken, during the preceding foundation year); we offer an academic curriculum which engages students with developments and activities at the forefront of research from their first day. Every Durham course:

    - begins with an four-week, pre-arrival Transitions e-learning programme (videos of staff and current students, interactive exercises and discussion boards) which helps students to bridge the gap between secondary education and research-led learning and independent study, and which is followed by an extended academic induction which introduces students into their relevant academic community of practice;
    - has a clearly articulated and progressive approach to academic contact, with an emphasis on smaller group teaching as students progress through each academic year, and one-to-one support in the final year in particular;
    - ensures that students make use of our outstanding specialist resources during their studies (research laboratories, specialist software, specialist equipment, and/or the primary sources contained within the University's extensive library, archive and museum collections); and,
    - concludes with a major 'capstone' research project (40-60 credits), undertaken by all undergraduate students.

59. This structure ensures that all of our students are consistently exposed to, and engaged in, research, that they are trained as researchers, and that they undertake substantive research themselves. It engenders a passion for the subject, and increases students' engagement with study, as outlined in previous sections, and as seen in the student-led subject societies and multi-disciplinary seminar series which operate in every department and college, and in our student-run undergraduate journals (such as, for example, the *Durham English Review*, or Philosophy's *Critique*). It directly contributes to our high levels of overall student satisfaction. Our analysis of free text comments in NSS2017 shows that students commonly (unprompted, in at least 1 in 10 responses) identified working with leading researchers and/or the freedom to research topics of their choice independently as positive aspects of their course they wanted to highlight. In free text comments within their 2016 reports, 45% of our external examiners praised our emphasis on research-led teaching and research/teaching links, and 29% the high-quality of our students' research projects.

60. A research-led education prepares students for further study, highly-skilled employment and long-term employment. By learning about and doing research, all of our students develop the higher-level skills, attributes, qualities and abilities that enable them to not only gain good outcomes 6 months after graduation, but to take control of their future lives and careers. This is shown by their outstanding results for long-term and highly-skilled employment.

Students' academic experiences are tailored to the individual, maximising rates of retention, attainment and progression.

61. A Durham degree is a balance of core content, aligned to disciplinary requirements, and student-led optionality taken within and outside the curriculum. All Durham students shape their course and their wider educational experience, building on the core knowledge and skills they have developed through their research-led education. All students are fully supported in this endeavour by dedicated academic advisers in their departments, by support staff in their colleges, and through our central Academic Skills Programme.

62. We worked with students, alumni and employers to identify the core attributes that make our graduates more employable (cf. 67), and we introduced specific opportunities to enhance those attributes through the curriculum. Since 2012, all Durham courses permit students to study modules outside their main discipline – in another discipline, in entrepreneurship or in a foreign language – and all courses allow students to incorporate study overseas or an integrated placement year. To help students effectively navigate this increased choice, we introduced an academic adviser system, providing each student with a dedicated point of academic contact for advice on course choice and personal skills development. Using our Skills Audit (cf. 68) as a starting point, advisers support students to develop a tailored educational experience, across curricular and co-curricular work, taking account of students' identified strengths, weaknesses, preferences and goals.

63. The impact of these changes has been significant, with students making much greater use of the flexibility afforded within their studies. Between 2012 and 2016, we saw a 40% increase in the number of undergraduate students undertaking study overseas, and a tripling of students undertaking integrated year-long placements. Over the last three years, 1500 students have chosen one of these options, and a further 1900 students have undertaken a placement or entrepreneurship module. Engagement with foreign language modules has risen even quicker: from 279 undergraduate registrations in 2011, to over 1000 in 2016. These in-curricular offerings are supported by extra-curricular Erasmus and employer placements, and non-credit-bearing language study, undertaken by a further 400 undergraduates each year. By their final year, 18% of our undergraduates will have spent more than three months living in a foreign country, and over half will have undertaken formal work experience with a graduate employer as part of their studies. This helps to explain why we are consistently ranked within the top ten universities most-often targeted by Britain's top graduate employers (cf. 70).

64. Through our Academic Skills Programme, we provide an accessible study support service aimed at students from under-represented groups. We have expanded the programme significantly over the last three years, doubling the number of available workshops between 2014 and 2016, and adding provision for broad-based academic skills development, including

more general support in mathematics and statistics, literacy, communication skills, IT, personal effectiveness and information skills. Student response has been extremely positive: over 2,000 students now undertake study skills workshops annually. 88% of students undertaking sessions with the Academic Writing Unit felt that their marks had improved as a result, and one in five students who completed mathematical and statistical skills training reported that it helped to keep them on courses they would otherwise have seriously considered leaving.

65. The impact of our approach to personalised learning and support can be seen in our outstanding rates of continuation (with positive flags for both full-time and part-time students) engagement, attainment, and highly-skilled and long-term employment outcomes. Our academic adviser system, and tailored support for students from under-represented or disadvantaged groups, has prompted significant improvements in our NSS performance for Academic Support. Performance against benchmark has risen year-on-year for the years covered by the TEF metrics; this has been driven by consistently more positive results for students from disadvantaged groups (with IMD, Mature and BME students all above benchmark).

VI. Student Outcomes

Students acquire knowledge, skills and attributes that are valued by employers and that enhance their personal and/or professional lives.

66. Launched to ensure that “all our graduates stand the very best chance of securing the type of employment they want”, our 2010 Employability and Enterprise Strategy made employability a focus at every stage of the student journey. From before they arrive in Durham to long after they have graduated, our students are supported in developing the knowledge and critical skills that are most valued by employers. Our success is embodied by our graduates and their outstanding prospects for highly-skilled and long-term employment.

67. Before they arrive in Durham, our students complete a Skills Audit that helps them discover the skills they should prioritise. Built around the skill categories which define a Durham graduate (the ‘Graduate Attributes’, developed in 2010-11 in collaboration with employers, alumni and students) the audit helps students think about the skills they need to succeed in their studies and achieve their educational and professional goals. Incoming students rate their confidence in particular areas, assess their current skills and identify attributes for development. They are then presented with personalised resources tailored to their priorities. From the beginning of their studies, students work together with a dedicated departmental academic adviser to identify and monitor key priorities that will be developed through their course and the wider educational opportunities associated with their colleges.

68. The integration of cutting-edge industry practice complements the research-led teaching in many of our courses in building relevant knowledge and skills. For example, head teachers discuss the application of educational theory in practice for our Primary Education students, group research projects across science and Engineering are typically industry-sponsored, and staff from our Museums and Specialist Collections teach courses in several departments. Some courses, such as our mixed-mode BSc Accounting, have been developed in partnership with employers and industry leaders. Others build on optional modules, such as CEFR-benchmarked language training and placement years, which have seen significant increase in uptake over the last five years (cf. 63).

69. Durham students access a wealth of wider educational opportunities through our colleges, which are multi-disciplinary, multi-generational and multi-dimensional communities, deliberately designed to ensure a balanced mix of subjects, study levels, backgrounds and nationalities amongst students. Colleges offer a programme of skills development, volunteering and employer-related opportunities, and support and facilitate participation in wide-ranging co-curricular activities, from inter-disciplinary seminar series to arts and music societies, and from mentorship schemes to community volunteering. Every college has an undergraduate representative body with a President and Executive Committee, and structures to support the running of societies, events and activities.

70. Participation in these aspects of college life is extremely high. Our own analysis, looking at six comparator research-intensive institutions, suggest that, despite Durham's relatively small size, we have seven times as many sport clubs, three times as many societies, twice as many volunteering projects and nearly five times as many people taking leadership positions as the average of these comparators. The 2017 High Fliers survey – which surveys students at the top 30 UK universities for graduate employability – indicates that our graduates are significantly more likely to have been active members of at least one society (almost three quarters of respondents) and to have held a senior leadership role (over half of respondents) when compared to students at other institutions with very high levels of graduate employability. Our colleges' contribution to curiosity-driven learning, to the skills for employability, and to good citizenship, contribute significantly to the success of Durham students.

71. The vision for our £16m financial aid programme, "Durham for all", is that "all admitted students should be able to attend, participate in and excel at the full range of opportunities available at Durham University regardless of background or financial means". In support of this aim, we provide funding at both a central and college level, with scholarships and bursaries which support participation in arts, music, sport and drama, international travel and study, extra-curricular fieldwork and placements, volunteering and community engagement, as well as equipment hire and purchase.

72. Our students are supported in developing their career and entrepreneurial skills by the Careers, Employability and Enterprise Centre, which is ranked 2nd nationally among Careers services in the 2015 Student Crowd Survey. Our Centre has a particular emphasis on developing entrepreneurial skills and mindsets, offering a menu of practical workshops delivered by employers and the University's Enterprise Coordinator, focusing on key entrepreneurial skills such as creativity, innovation, problem solving, opportunity identification and adaptability. Tailored business start-up support is available via a structured referral process, with a year-round offering of one to one business advice through the Business Clinic. All students can take advantage of our newly established innovation and enterprise hub.

73. Participation and engagement with this support programme is high, with over 400 specific enterprise workshops and individual Business Clinic sessions delivered annually, alongside almost 2800 one-to-one adviser appointments with individual students. In the last three years, our graduate start-ups have been nominated for Santander Universities Entrepreneurship Awards and the Duke of York Award for Entrepreneurship, and Enactus Durham, one of our two main student entrepreneurial societies, was recognised as the UK's Most Improved Team in the finals of the UK National Enactus Competition.

74. The range of educational opportunities within and alongside the curriculum at Durham was praised by the QAA in our 2016 HER, which identified as good practice "the systematic commitment to providing a wide range of extracurricular activities that enriches the student experience". Our students take full advantage of the opportunities which we provide to develop their leadership, team-working and communication skills, which are so valuable to employers and society. We know that, during their time at Durham, our students develop the skills that will enable them to make the best possible contribution to society, the economy and their communities in the future. This makes a key contribution – alongside our provision of research-led education – to our outstanding long-term employment outcomes as demonstrated by LEO and the longitudinal DLHE.

Positive outcomes are achieved by students from all backgrounds, in particular those from disadvantage backgrounds or those who are at greater risk of not achieving positive outcomes.

75. We are committed to educational equity. For Durham to fulfil its mission it must be a diverse and inclusive community. All students, regardless of background or financial means, should be able to participate in and excel at the full range of educational opportunities offered by the University. This is an area where we have many examples of excellent practice – noted throughout this submission – and are committed, through our *Strategy*, to further development.

76. Ensuring positive outcomes for all begins with outreach. We work with over 40,000 school-aged students per year, as well as liaising with teachers, parents and carers. We work particularly closely with the most able, but least likely to apply, students from the North East, Cumbria and Yorkshire through our flagship Supported Progression Compact Scheme, which has been very successful since it began in 2011. We offer a two-year programme of pre-University events for 340 selected students per year, designed to develop an academic ethos and maintain motivation through Years 12 and 13. Participants who choose to progress to study at Durham get a guaranteed offer and bursaries to support their studies. Over a third of participants progress to Durham, and outcomes for these students are as outstanding for these students as for any other Durham students. 94.3% of them complete a degree with the University, which is just below our 95.6% average completion rate, and considerably above sector average *continuation* rates (92.7% in 2015-16). For our first two graduating cohorts, the employment or further study rate in DLHE was 93.75%, which is in line with both our overall DLHE results and our benchmarks.

77. A further increase in applications from under-represented groups has come through our partnership with the Sutton Trust Summer Schools scheme. The Summer Schools have generated 134 enrolments at Durham since 2013. We have doubled our annual student intake over the last three years, and we now attract the second highest proportion of applications after Cambridge. We are developing the scheme through e-mentoring and closer integration with our academic departments to increase recruitment further. Since 2015, we have worked with the Social Mobility Foundation on our Increasing Diversity project, which targets BME students in particular. Through the project we are building long-term relationships with teachers and students in schools in Yorkshire, Manchester, the West Midlands, and London. Our programme of activity includes campus visits, residential events, and a new student ambassador programme providing BME students with role models currently studying at Durham.

78. We have robust, supportive and transparent processes for working with students with disabilities, as well as with those who face serious adverse circumstances. This year, we were Highly Commended for providing Outstanding Support for Students in the 2017 Times Higher Awards. Our approach has consistently received strong external verification, being described by external examiners as “exemplary,” and the “best practice which I have observed”. In our 2016 HER Report, the QAA commended our “comprehensive and high-quality pastoral support for students' personal development and learning”. That same year, our Chief Examiner commented that:

    I am particularly impressed by the care which Boards and Committees exercise in dealing with individual cases. This is reflected in their willingness to take difficult decisions while making full use of the scope for exercising their judgment and discretion as envisaged by the regulatory framework ***and thus ensuring both the maintenance of standards and equitable treatment for students****. This, in my view, is a marker of excellence arising out of a justified confidence in the University’s practices and policies and in the quality of its learning, teaching, and assessment.*

79. We systematically monitor the performance of students from under-represented groups, at a departmental and institutional level, through annual and periodic reviews. We have seen consistent improvements in student attainment over the last five years (cf. 17, 36). Programmes and initiatives aimed at students from under-represented groups – such as enhanced career support for mature students (cf. 16-18), the work of our Inclusive Learning and Curriculum Diversity groups (cf. 27), and our Academic Skills Programme (cf. 64) – are noted throughout this submission, alongside evidence of the positive impact which each has had. We have targeted internship and placement opportunities specifically designed for students from under-represented groups, and we provide institutional and college bursaries to enable all students, regardless of background, to take full advantage of Durham’s wider educational opportunities (cf. 71).

80. The combined impact of these initiatives is evident in our TEF split metrics, where we have 9 positive flags (including 7 double positive flags) for students from under-represented groups. Our performance against benchmark, in the NSS and in relation to employability (and

particularly highly-skilled employability), is typically positive and consistently higher for students from under-represented or disadvantaged backgrounds. Our BME split is positive across the board, with double positive flags for Assessment (4.7 points above benchmark) and Highly Skilled Employment (7.9 points), and we are just 0.047 percentage points from a positive flag for Teaching.

81. Our biggest challenge is ensuring that we recruit, admit and then enrol a vibrantly diverse student body. This is a key commitment made in the new *Strategy*, facilitated by our decision to integrate academic and student support staff within our Centre for Academic Development, and to centralise our previously dispersed recruitment and admissions teams. This permits us to coordinate outreach, recruitment and admissions in a more sophisticated and fine-grained way.

***Students achieve their educational and professional goals, in particular progression to further study or highly skilled employment*.**

82. The outcomes achieved by Durham graduates are unequivocally outstanding. Over the last three years, just under 25% of our students have gone onto further study, significantly above the sector average (15%). We have a double positive flag for highly-skilled employability, and are in the top 10% of all providers, with positive flags for every year and for every under-represented student group. We are in the top 10% of all providers in both supplementary LEO metrics, with a double positive flag for median salary.

83. Looking beyond the TEF metrics, we have the highest long-term employment rates in the UK, according to the most recent longitudinal DLHE survey, with positive long-term outcomes for students from under-represented groups (cf. 15, 22). We are one of the top 30 High Fliers universities targeted by blue chip graduate recruiters, consistently appearing in the top 10 of that group. While, on average, 20% of final year undergraduates at the top 30 institutions had secured a job offer by February of their final year, at Durham the figure is 39%. We are ranked 34th globally for employer reputation in the *QS World University Rankings 2017/18*.

84. Throughout this provider submission we demonstrate how the quality of teaching at Durham leads to these outstanding student outcomes. Everything that we do aims to produce graduates who are prepared for a meaningful life and career, not just a narrowly defined and immediate job. Our metrics demonstrate our continued success meeting this objective.

VIII. Conclusion

85. Durham University seeks to prepare today's students for tomorrow's challenges and opportunities. We want to empower all students to learn and develop to their full potential. We envision a world in which Durham graduates contribute to their communities by being critically engaged global citizens, capable of and dedicated to a life of learning, leadership, innovation and service.

86. The positive impact of our strategic investments and improvements over the last 5 years is evident. It can be seen in targeted projects, such as our revisions to feedback and introduction of the Academic Skills Programme, and the resulting improvements in our NSS metrics. It can be seen in our commitment to research-led education, personalised learning and the development of graduate attributes, and in our outstanding outcomes for long-term and highly-skilled employment.

87. If we are to prepare students for the future, we must constantly reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of our educational offer. Our graduates' record of achievement testifies to the transformative power of a Durham education. At the same time, we acknowledge that there is, and always will be, much work to be done. Through overlapping cycles of reflection, innovation and analysis, we seek to continuously improve the value of a Durham education.