Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework
Year Four Provider Submission

1. INTRODUCTION

Established in 1921, University Centre Reaseheath (UCR) is a specialist land-based institution, which has been providing outstanding vocational education & training directly aligned with the business needs of rural industries for nearly 100 years. Our curriculum focus is higher-level technical knowledge and professional skills development, preparing our graduates for sustainable employment and life-long learning. Our higher education curriculum is currently comprised of 61% FdSc and 39% BSc provision. We remain true to our mission to deliver a high-quality curriculum that is responsive to technological advancements in the land-based sector. All programmes have a high level of Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) content and we are a national training provider for many blue-chip companies, including JCB, John Deere, Tetra Pak and Arla Foods.

Our unwavering commitment to high quality learning and teaching, a culture of continuous enhancement and collaboration, and the centrality of our students in all that we do was reflected in our most recent QAA review[1]. The QAA identified seven areas of good practice and awarded two commendations (quality of student learning opportunities and the enhancement of student learning opportunities), endorsing our culture of excellence. In recognition of the strength and success of our provision, and with the support of our exclusive validating partner (University of Chester), we were granted University Centre status in January 2017 by the Queen's Privy Council. Subsequently, in October 2018, University Centre Reaseheath (UCR) was officially placed on the Office for Students register of Higher Education providers with no conditions of registration imposed. As a College, our further education provision is also held in high regard nationally, rated by Ofsted as 'Good with Outstanding features'[2] and our residential services are graded as 'Outstanding' under the Ofsted Care Standards[3].

Based in Nantwich, Cheshire, we are unique within the local area as the only land-based provider within the Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Warrington local authorities, accommodating specialist resources and high-quality teaching facilities on our 330-hectare campus. We contract our own regional transport service to provide over 1,000 students per day with free travel within a 50-mile radius of the College campus. This significantly reduces barriers to access and is a key component of our success in widening participation in Higher Education.

Working in partnership with our Student Association, in this submission we seek to make a compelling case that a TEF Silver award is appropriate to the excellence of the teaching and student outcomes delivered by UCR. All our students are challenged to achieve their full potential, and acquire knowledge, skills and understanding that are highly valued by employers. Our institutional culture facilitates, rewards and recognises excellent teaching, which is embedded throughout our curriculum.

1.1 Mission and Values

Our mission is to "inspire achievement by delivering outstanding education and skills." Our underpinning values are:

- placing students, staff and customers at the heart of all that we do;
- being responsible for our own actions and decisions whilst making a positive contribution to community cohesion and pride;
- demonstrating honesty, integrity and ethical standards in everything that we do;

[1] QAA Higher Education Review - Reaseheath College (May 2014)
[2] Ofsted Inspection Report – Reaseheath College (November, 2015)
[3] Ofsted Care Standards Inspection Report – Reaseheath College (June, 2017)

- actively promoting equality by respecting, promoting and celebrating diversity and individual difference and striving to create an inclusive learning and living environment;
- challenging ourselves to strive for the highest standards of quality and behaviour by adopting a supportive self-critical approach in our pursuit of excellence.

1.2 Provider context

Over the last 14 years, as an organisation, we have grown our establishment from a turnover of £9m in 2004, to £33m in 2018. As part of this growth, in 2011, we initiated a bespoke strategy for Higher Education to outline our vision for development and enhancement, resulting in us securing direct funding for our provision from 2012/13. The strategy successfully secured the rapid growth of HE provision, with HE income increasing from £2m to £7m and now representing 21% of our turnover with around 750 HE students (headcount). This growth enabled the formation of a designated HE faculty within our separate University Centre building, enabling us to create greater differentiation between our further and higher education student experience.

We have a longstanding partnership agreement with the University of Chester (UoC) who are now our only validating HEI. We have a small number of students completing programmes under a teach-out arrangement with our former validating HEI, Harper Adams University. All of our programmes are taught on our campus by UCR staff. This allows us to utilise our specialist resources effectively to co-deliver courses with areas of commonality and affords both partners the opportunity to increase joint student numbers through strategic responses to joint bidding opportunities. UoC has devolved responsibilities pertaining to academic quality and standards (including student admissions, external examiner nomination and guidance, link tutor and staff CPD and the administration of assessment boards) in recognition of the trust the University places in our activities, the standards of our provision and our capability as a HE provider.

Our students are recruited regionally (60% within a 50-mile radius), nationally (38.6%) and internationally (1.4%). Social mobility is at the heart of our strategy, with a firm commitment to widening participation and promoting access to HE. Between 2016 and 2018, an average of 37.4% of our student cohort originated from areas with low participation in HE study (POLAR 3, quintiles 1-2). Our student population represents a broad age range, with 43% identified as mature students with a gender ratio of 3:1 (female:male), representative of the nature of our curriculum. In terms of ethnicity, our student body is representative of the regional demographic, with fewer than 5% of HE students drawn from ethnic groups other than White-British. In 2017-18, 24% of students declared a learning difficulty or disability against a national benchmark of 12%[4] (includes disability, learning difficulty or medical condition). The rich diversity of our student population drives our provision of a flexible, dynamic and personalised learning experience.

We believe that the higher education experience must be about more than simply acquiring a qualification: it should be personally transformative, aspirational and career focused. For us, this means providing a University experience which supports and challenges students academically to realise their potential; exposes them to diverse opportunities to support their personal and social development; and provides practical, work-based experiences, effectively preparing them for their careers of choice.

2. TEACHING QUALITY

A culture of excellence in teaching and learning for all students is the fundamental characteristic of UCR. Students and staff work in partnership to drive continual enhancement in every aspect of teaching and learning throughout the organisation and work collaboratively to inform management and governance decisions at all levels. The impact of this partnership approach can be seen in numerous comparative metrics. Our NSS results show sustained improvement in satisfaction with teaching with a 4% point increase to 84% between 2016 and 2018, which is comparable with the mean teaching satisfaction metric for TEF Silver FE Colleges nationally. Our TEF metrics for the past 3 years show no negative flags for “Teaching on my Course”.

[4] https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018_HE-stats-report-students.pdf

169 of 211 respondents to the 2018 NSS survey study programmes in the subject area of 'Agriculture, Food and Related studies' rated their satisfaction with 'teaching on my course' at 90.6% (89.04 top-quartile threshold). Comparing NSS teaching satisfaction with Landex members (a consortium of specialist land-based further and higher education providers) within the same subject grouping, confirms that we are the highest performing institution currently awarded a bronze TEF rating, and our performance in this area is comparable with a number of gold-rated institutions (see Table 1). This adds further confirmation of our institutional culture of facilitating excellent teaching befitting of a TEF Silver provider.

Provider	TEF	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Teaching on my course
Nottingham Trent University	Gold	98%	91%	94%	92%	**94%**
Hartpury College	Gold	100%	92%	90%	88%	**93%**
Reaseheath College	Bronze	**94%**	**88%**	**88%**	**85%**	**89%**
Sparsholt College	Gold	97%	93%	80%	83%	**88%**
Writtle University College	Bronze	91%	83%	83%	87%	**86%**
Harper Adams University	Gold	83%	86%	85%	84%	**85%**
University of Lincoln	Gold	90%	76%	90%	81%	**84%**
The Royal Agricultural University	Silver	92%	82%	79%	79%	**83%**
Hadlow College	Bronze	88%	82%	82%	76%	**82%**
Bishop Burton College	Bronze	84%	82%	75%	78%	**80%**
Derby College	Silver	94%	81%	75%	69%	**80%**
Guildford College of Further and Higher Education	Bronze	94%	76%	76%	71%	**79%**
Askham Bryan College	Bronze	87%	81%	74%	72%	**79%**
Myerscough College	Gold	83%	83%	79%	62%	**77%**
Cornwall College	Silver	81%	73%	72%	72%	**75%**
Warwickshire College	Bronze	89%	65%	68%	68%	**73%**
Northumberland College	Silver	79%	68%	68%	53%	**67%**
BMC (Brooksby Melton College)	Bronze	80%	60%	70%	40%	**63%**

Table 1 – NSS 2018 comparison of Landex institutions: 'teaching on my course' satisfaction for 'other undergraduate' awards in 'agriculture, food and related studies'[5]

We have a particularly high proportion of students declaring a learning disability in comparison to the national average (24% vs 12%). These disabilities include specific learning difficulties (SpLDs), mental health issues and autistic spectrum disorders (ASDs). Many of these students would not feel able to study HE in a larger institution, and supporting them to achieve at a level comparable to their peers is one of our greatest strengths. Retention rates for both student groups are identical with only a minor deviation in achievement of 2% points between those declaring a learning difficulty/disability and those who do not.

We have taken the conscious step of employing an in-house team of specialist support staff who are fully integrated into all aspects of HE management and delivery. All students who declare a learning need on application are contacted by the HE Support Team (HEST) prior to their enrolment and offered bespoke guidance regarding their support needs. Where appropriate, students are supported through the Disabled Students Allowance (DSA) application process. This process is greatly facilitated by an on-site, DSA accredited 'Needs Assessment Centre' which removes a major access barrier for students with disabilities. All students who require a needs assessment have access to a significant UCR bursary. The HEST team develop an Individual Learning Plan (ILP) for each student which is held securely on the student management system and is accessible to tutors and support staff. Each student works closely with their Learning Mentor to set their own personal development

[5] Data extracted from WonkHE: https://wonkhe.com/blogs/nss2018-feeling-the-heat/

targets which they reflect on and review regularly. Internal surveys of students accessing the HEST support show overwhelmingly positive responses, with all categories scoring 4.4 or above out of 5.

All HE tutors receive regular professional development on a variety of learning disabilities including dyslexia, ASD and a range of mental health conditions. They are then fully equipped to design teaching materials and plan sessions which enable all students to fully engage with their learning. These actions have had a significant positive impact for this constituency of students, being reflected in a 9% increase in NSS scores relating to 'satisfaction with teaching' (up to 96%) and a 34% increase in respect of 'assessment and feedback' (up to 86%). Furthermore, 'academic support' demonstrated a similarly impressive improvement in satisfaction with a 27% increase over the last three years (95% in 2018) and overall satisfaction shows the same trend with a 19% increase over the last three years (100% satisfaction in 2018).

First year students receive a minimum of 19 timetabled contact hours weekly, comprised of lectures, workshops, practical sessions and group and individual tutorials. Programmes are designed to promote the development of independent study skills as students progress, while the staff "office hours" scheme makes each staff member available for between 3 and 5 hours weekly on a drop-in basis to give students the guaranteed opportunity to seek 1:1 support from subject specialists. This is in addition to bookable 1:1 appointments. Consequently, the total contact hours can be individualised for those who require more support or wish to be stretched.

2.1 Student Engagement (TQ1) and Rigour and Stretch (TQ3)

Our students are key partners in shaping the learning experience within the College. Every cohort elects a Student Academic Representative (StAR) who acts as spokesperson for their designated programmes of study. StARs gather feedback regarding teaching regularly during the academic year, which is collated and discussed with staff during monthly StAR Council meetings. Where appropriate, actions are swiftly put in place to disseminate exemplary practice and address any issues. Course Committee meetings are held termly during which the StARs contribute directly to the discussion of teaching and programme management. The student voice is also represented by student members of the HE Academic Board and the HE Committee of the Governing Body. This ensures that College management and Governing Body incorporate the student voice directly into their decision-making activities. The success of this approach is evidenced in the fact that in NSS 2018, all questions relating to 'student voice' scored 10% above the sector average. Successful examples of how the StAR Council have strengthened the student experience over the past two years (through both planning and continued monitoring) include introducing innovations around assessment and feedback to help students understand how they can progress from an average 2.1 to a first, and improving careers service support through providing job shops where students can find employment during term-time, and bringing work-related study into the curriculum.

External examiner feedback regularly and consistently identifies exemplary practice in ensuring the quality of teaching and assessment, in particular the development of critical thinking, and graduate attributes to enhance employability. The production of industry ready, highly employable graduates is fundamental to the success of the College. We pride ourselves on the opportunities we cultivate for near-industry knowledge accumulation. Every area of the College works closely with employers and industry partners to ensure that all students develop not only academic knowledge, but also up-to-date industry awareness and a wide range of graduate characteristics. Examples include the complete design and build of show gardens at Tatton Flower Show which regularly win national accolades, production of a Conservation Management Plan for the largest Gothic Revival Castle in Europe (Gwrych Castle in North Wales), supply of the arena party for the Horse of the Year Show and Bolesworth International show-jumping championships, direct involvement with wildlife conservation projects worldwide from Cornwall to Costa Rica. Our on-site commercial facilities allow students to apply scientific theory in a practical setting which reflects what they will experience after graduation, helping them to develop the capability and capacity to be successful in their chosen field. They are given the space and opportunities to make mistakes in a safe environment, to evaluate, reflect, improve and succeed. This builds not only knowledge and understanding, but also personal resilience and self-confidence.

2.2 Valuing Teaching (TQ2)

Our five-year 'Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy' articulates the ongoing drive for continuous improvement in the quality of teaching at UCR; however, it is the culture and ethos of the organisation as a whole which motivates staff to be reflective practitioners who continually embrace new pedagogic methods. This ethos is established in new staff through an intensive, structured training and mentoring scheme during the first two years of employment. All new staff benefit from 1:1 guidance from the HE Teaching and Learning Coach and are supported to gain an initial teaching qualification. By the third year of their employment, staff are supported to have achieved a postgraduate teaching qualification and fellowship of the Higher Education Academy. All staff take part in a peer observation scheme, regular learning walks and have graded session observations. Observation feedback is structured, supportive, and informs the development of the weekly professional development programme. Recent topics explored in these weekly sessions have included the use of technology for continuous formative assessment, and questioning techniques for large groups, both of which have improved interactivity and hence student engagement in lectures. All our teaching staff are employed on permanent contracts, which fosters personal investment in the performance of the College and its students. Results from teaching observations feed into the annual professional development review process which is designed to recognise and reward excellence in teaching, which is evaluated through a separate judgement for each member of staff. Staff work with their managers to set annual objectives centred on the development of their teaching practice, supporting student success and their personal development. These objectives are reviewed termly.

The "Tried and Tested" programme was introduced in the 2017-18 academic year to encourage staff to develop new teaching techniques and to act as a vehicle for the dissemination of exemplary practice. The scheme requires all teaching practitioners to undertake a short-term project either as an individual or with the support of colleagues, in which they trial a new concept or method within their teaching practice and reflect and report on its success. To-date, a wide range of projects have covered aspects as diverse as the embedding of a 'Growth Mind-set' in session design, to the use of Technology Enhanced Learning. These projects are presented at an annual conference attended by staff from Reaseheath and other colleges in the North West and have led to the adoption of new and innovative teaching techniques which cater for all learning preferences.

We are a teaching-led institution and believe that research-informed and research-led teaching are fundamental to a high-quality learning experience for all students. Investment in the promotion of a culture of scholarship and research increases year-on-year, most recently illustrated by the appointment of a Head of Projects, Research and Innovation and an Advanced Practitioner for Scholarship and Research. As a leading, specialist, land-based provider, we work closely with employer stakeholders to support business improvement and innovation. Our projects incorporate working with farmers on environmental and sustainability issues, and with suppliers to test and validate new products and technologies. Furthermore, a scholarly activity fund is available to all staff to support conference attendance, training and attainment of postgraduate qualifications. Staff that have a demonstrable record of maintaining good practice in learning and teaching (as reflected in our PDR frameworks) and have obtained formal recognition of their professional standing in teaching in accordance with the UK Professional Standards Framework, are able to progress to Senior Lecturer status within the institution, thereby keeping good teaching practitioners in the classroom whilst also providing aspirational and professional development for other teaching staff.

2.3 Feedback (TQ4)

The depth and detail of our feedback on marked work has been highlighted as a strength by several external examiners. Between 2016 and 2018 student satisfaction with assessment and feedback has increased by 13% overall. NSS 2018 results show that satisfaction in this area is 2% above the sector benchmark for all students, and 7% above the sector benchmark for full-time students. We are currently working closely with our part-time cohorts to understand the reasons why they are less satisfied with assessment and feedback than their full-time peers and to develop models which will produce improvements in this area. Current initiatives we are piloting this year include a student guide to utilising feedback and an online assessment and feedback toolkit, designed for both staff

and students to be an ever-improving resource to understand and use the most appropriate forms of assessment and feedback in learning and teaching. Our part-time programmes primarily consist of students who combine their studies with work commitments, which can be challenging. For all programmes, written coursework is submitted, marked and feedback delivered via Turnitin. Staff are proficient in the use of 'Quickmarks', in-text comments and grading rubrics, which allow students to see exactly where marks have been gained and lost, and to act on developmental feedback to enhance future submissions. We are also trialling the use of audio feedback through Turnitin to remove barriers to accessing feedback for students with specific learning difficulties. At the start of each academic year, students submit a formative assessment which receives extensive feedback but is not graded and does not carry any modular credit. This has been identified by students as being invaluable to them in terms of developing higher-level academic skills at an early stage of their course. However, we do not limit our feedback to periodic written comments on submitted work. Small group sizes and task-orientated teaching sessions where the lecturer acts as facilitator rather than instructor, foster a culture of continual peer-to-peer and staff-student discussion and evaluation. This provides rich and varied ongoing feedback which allows each student to develop as an individual. This personalised approach to our provision clearly secures high levels of student engagement and commitment to learning and study, a principle inherent within a Silver-level institution.

3. LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

Our integrated approach to the student experience recognises the equal importance of high-quality teaching and personalised support, the provision of excellent physical and digital resources and an emphasis on the role of extracurricular opportunities for personal development. Our investment in the physical environment aims not only to create highly effective learning spaces, but to provide a setting that is welcoming and supportive to maximise student engagement and wellbeing.

Our 330-hectare campus includes arable and grazing farmland, parkland, ancient woodlands, landscaped gardens, listed buildings, archaeological sites, lakes, ponds, and a stretch of the river Weaver as well as a wealth of specialist modern buildings. These environments provide a huge diversity of teaching resources and learning opportunities and are widely used in the delivery of our programmes. Our *Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy* is focused around working in partnership with students and employers to co-create a high-quality, innovative curriculum which develops academic knowledge and skills and embeds real-world, technical and professional education. We embed opportunities for students to apply their learning in industry standard environments to facilitate career-aligned learning and embed vocationally relevant opportunities which maximise graduate employability and capability.

We are committed to continuous investment in our learning resources and facilities to ensure a high-quality learning experience. Our specialist facilities have benefited significantly from an £80m capital investment programme over the last 10 years. The physical environment is designed to recognise that many of our students come from backgrounds where there is very little or no experience of higher education and effective learning spaces may not be readily accessible. The needs of all our students are firmly embedded within our estates and IT strategies to ensure consideration is given not only to formal learning spaces, but the power of informal and social learning space in supporting effective learning. We have also invested significantly in on-campus residences[6] as our evidence shows that giving students the opportunity to live on campus maximises their chances of retention.

The most recent QAA review of our provision recognised that 'the quality and accessibility of the facilities are recognised as a strength of the provision by students' and 'the College's learning environments are of a high standard with teaching accommodation, a VLE, ICT and traditional library resources complimented by industry-standard specialist resources'[7]. The campus environment also provides support services, study and social spaces, and provides easy access to all the social, retail and cultural opportunities in Nantwich. Chester, Manchester and Liverpool are all accessible within one hour's travel from Crewe mainline train station. Our success in creating an environment that

[6] Increased almost 2 fold over the last 10 years from under 600 bed-spaces to a 1000

[7] QAA Higher Education Review – Reaseheath College (May 2014)

effectively supports student learning is evidenced by the statistically significant positive performance on this measure in the metrics.

3.1 Resources (LE1)

The University Centre situated in the heart of the campus is accessible only to HE students via swipe-card entry and provides 24-hour access to our core teaching facilities. This provides our HE students with a clear identity and promotes a distinct HE culture within the College. In addition to teaching and study spaces, the University Centre houses two free-access IT suites, a popular café and fast, reliable Wi-Fi. In September 2018, a new expansion to the University Centre was opened providing a range of innovative new teaching rooms and student bookable study spaces.

In developing our campus, careful consideration has been given to the ways in which we not only create the best possible learning environment, but also support employability; we develop industry-standard environments to support high-quality teaching, student scholarship, and professional practice. Our high quality and digital resources are used by our students to enhance their learning, a key barometer of a Silver organisation. Our subject specialist teaching resources include a state-of-the-art Agricultural Technology Centre housing precision farming technology such as GPS driven tractors, soil mapping equipment and servicing areas for all types of modern agricultural machinery allowing students to gain the technical knowledge and skills required by the industry. Our Horticulture, Science and Technology Centre incorporates design studios, laboratories and research spaces, state-of-the-art environmentally controlled glasshouses including hydroponic growing units and numerous teaching, study and social spaces. These resources regularly house student-led commercial production projects, as well as the smaller scale micro-propagation of rare and endangered plant species.

Our Equestrian Centre houses over 50 horses in a variety of stable types, and boasts an international standard indoor arena, two outdoor arenas, equisage equipment, biomechanics equipment and a variety of teaching spaces. Undergraduate projects are undertaken using these facilities every year, many of which are presented by students at the annual Alltech Hartpury Conference. We also host a year-round schedule of dressage and show-jumping competitions at all levels, and clinics, lectures and demonstrations by some of the world's top riders and trainers.

Our commercial farm houses 250 pedigree Holstein milking cattle plus 200 head of young stock, 120 breeding sows with offspring reared for bacon accommodated in a £1M high welfare unit with strict biosecurity protocols, a flock of 500 breeding ewes and arable land and equipment for production of home-grown forage. Students use real-time production and financial data to develop business analysis and planning skills, which are evidenced by the fact that they regularly win national Farm Business Planner competitions.

Our fully licensed Zoo houses over 250 species ranging from invertebrates and fish to an array of mammals, including primates. Under the supervision of subject specialist staff, final year students carry out high-quality data collection using this unique range of species which allows them to pursue their own preferred species specialism.

Our Food Technology Centre incorporates industry standard food processing halls, accredited by the British Retail Consortium AA standard for global food safety. We are the only College in the world to hold such an accreditation and our dedicated product development areas are regularly used by both small local businesses and global food manufacturers to develop and trial new recipes.

A new development for 2018 has been the opening of a brand new £6M sports facility, which incorporates a cutting-edge sports science laboratory featuring a haematology analyser and a hyperbaric altitude chamber, 4G multi-sport pitches and an internal climbing wall.

Our most valuable resource and the one that has the greatest positive impact on the student's learning experience is our staff. All our teaching staff are vocational specialists who have spent time working in their industry and who also possess the academic qualifications and experience which is required to teach at degree level. This combination enables them to enrich teaching with first hand examples of the application of scientific and theoretical concepts. Our students genuinely appreciate

and respect the industry experience of the tutors and aspire to follow in their footsteps. A common theme amongst the responses to every internal survey is the strong appreciation for knowledgeable, highly enthusiastic and approachable tutors.

In addition to the physical environment, we support the development of innovative approaches to teaching and learning that equip our students with knowledge and skills to enhance their employability, including use of new technologies. Our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is used by every tutor to support students on programmes delivered face-to-face and by blended learning. This carefully structured online learning content is continuously refined and improved in response to student feedback. We have clear guidelines and standards for Moodle page content, and every course and module page is audited annually to ensure the transparency and consistency of information available. All departments work to enhance their use of the VLE, incorporating, for example, the adoption of multimedia and interactive discussion tools and specific mobile learning applications. Guidance on the development and use of TEL is provided by a dedicated team of learning technologists with bespoke sessions delivered by our dedicated Learning and Teaching Coach and Advanced Practitioners across curricula. External examiners and professional advisors have continuously praised the resources available across our modules and programmes of study (IT facilities, library provision, specialist vocational resources), stating that "independent learning is evident and is demonstrated through the design of exam questions and course work assignments, which utilise curriculum-derived specialist facilities and software" (Chris Brough, External Examiner, Agriculture programmes).

Our deep engagement with the industries we serve allows our students access to more than just the College's resources. Within easy reach are some of the biggest and most technologically advanced organisations within the land-based sector, for example Muller Dairies, Maelor Nurseries and JCB Engineering, who regularly host student visits, deliver guest lectures and advise on curriculum development, ensuring our students understand the current and future advances in their industry. Our vast network of industry contacts yields significant opportunities for valuable work placements which are a feature of every programme and provide students with invaluable experience in their chosen field, with many students progressing to full-time employment with their placement provider following graduation.

3.2 Scholarship, Research and Professional Practice (LE2)

We are fully committed to the scholarship of teaching and learning, placing equal value on the importance of the application of knowledge from pedagogic research as we do from disciplinary research. Our Higher Education curriculum incorporates a wide range of opportunities for students to engage in their research and professional practice, enabling them to become producers as well as consumers of knowledge – further testimony to the confidence in our submission as a Silver-level provider. Students from Animal Science regularly present their dissertation research alongside UCR staff at the annual British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums (BIAZA) research conference, a prestigious and key event for zoo professionals. Equine students present annually at the Alltech Hartpury conference, and this year one of our students beat strong national competition to win the 'dissertation of the year'. Several students have subsequently published their research as a result of these opportunities. This year, students at UCR have also had submissions accepted for presentation at the British Conference for Undergraduate Research (BCUR) in April 2019. Opportunities such as these, enable our students to discuss their areas of work with their peers and academics regionally and nationally, building their confidence and self-esteem whilst developing a wide network of contacts. We also provide an annual Scholarship to the Oxford Farming Conference for one of our Agriculture students. This is the UK's premier farming conference at which the Scholar's programme affords students the opportunity to meet with policy makers, Ministers of State and CEO's of the largest global agricultural organisations.

Annual domestic and international study tours are a key feature of the UCR academic year. During the 2017-18 academic year Animal Science students travelled to South Africa and Costa Rica where they took part in conservation field work, Holland to study Zoo design and management and Cornwall to undertake UK based conservation fieldwork. Agriculture students travelled to Canada and Ireland to investigate alternative production and management methods, whilst business students visited

London and Barcelona to evaluate the facilities built for the Olympic Games in each city. Offering both domestic and international tours, coupled with the availability of study tour bursaries as part of our access and participation plan, maximises the number of students able to participate. Study tours provide often life-changing opportunities for students to link their studies with a wider national and international perspective.

Our validation and review processes require programme teams to demonstrate how their research and practice have influenced programme design and assessment practices. These endeavours provide scope for high levels of stretch that ensures that all students are actively and significantly challenged; consolidating our Silver-level practice. This is a requirement at all levels with a particular emphasis at level 6 to ensure students are effectively engaged in how to use research and reflect on practice. Staff are expected to provide teaching in which the research process is modelled: where evidence from research is a core feature, research articles are part of the standard resources and students undertake research in dissertations and capstone projects. This is underpinned by the provision of integrated support in information literacy.

Staff are actively encouraged and supported to pursue their own research interests and can access the College's Scholarly Activity fund for financial support for conference attendance, research materials or attainment of postgraduate qualifications. Currently, 51 of our 63 HE-affiliated staff delivering on our HE programmes (81%) have a postgraduate qualification. 42 of our colleagues are qualified to MSc level, whilst a further 9 have attained their PhD. 24 of these staff (44%) have also secured HEA Fellowship accreditation, with a further 8 colleagues working towards this professional recognition.

3.3 Personalised Learning (LE3)

Our whole approach to the student academic experience is based on delivering a tailored, personalised experience underpinned by high quality, individual relationships. Substantial effort is invested in ensuring students are aware of support mechanisms and we work closely with the Student Association to provide complementary support. Given the diversity of our provision and our student body, one size does not fit all and personalised responses, delivered at a local level, are crucial.

Each cohort is assigned to a specific course manager, who remains with the cohort throughout the duration of the programme. This ensures that the staff member gets to know each individual within their cohort and becomes a trusted first point of contact. Close liaison between the course manager, HE Support Team, Wellbeing and Residential Services ensures a holistic package of personalised support can be offered to every student. The central student records system (Pro-Monitor) is used by all staff to record academic and personal information in a secure, confidential environment, and a system of 'flags' can be implemented to alert the appropriate services to any developing situations that may impact on academic performance or personal wellbeing. Once students arrive, we have a range of systems and processes designed to provide a personalised, high quality experience aimed at maximising retention and attainment. Most notably, these include systems to track and monitor student attendance and engagement with their studies, which are used to drive interventions where individuals are deemed to be at risk of withdrawal or underperformance. They also crucially underpin the information available to personal tutors and course managers in order to aid meaningful conversations.

We place a high value on the role of the personal tutor. Students are assigned a personal tutor for the duration of their studies; their role is not only to support the student's pastoral needs but to encourage them to engage fully in all learning opportunities, including those that will enhance their employability. We timetable weekly course tutorials to provide opportunity for tutors to discuss course arrangements and deliver group tutorials on academic and personal development. A standardised course tutorial scheme of work and a bank of online learning materials are in place to provide support for tutors in delivering course tutorials. The course tutorial scheme of work is also linked to the Graduate Employability programme, a College initiative to provide a central focus for the development of student employability skills. In so doing, we ensure consistency of opportunity for all students. All students are offered a minimum of three individual tutorials per year to review

and set targets, and residential students are offered four 1:1 tutorials per year, a part of their Individual Residential Development Plan (IRDP), which focuses on nurturing independent living and personal development skills.

4. STUDENT OUTCOMES AND LEARNING GAIN

Whilst there is no consensus on measurement of Learning Gain, we endorse HEFCE's broad definition of *'an attempt to measure the improvement in knowledge, skills, work-readiness and personal development made by students during their time spent in higher education'*. Student outcomes receive close consideration within our annual programme monitoring in the form of a structured conversation between an internal panel chaired by a member of the executive management team and the academic department. The conversation includes active consideration of cohort data on retention, progression, attainment and graduate employment outcomes to inform planning of departmental priorities for teaching and support.

4.1 Employment and Further Study (SO1)

Our graduates are well-prepared for employment and further study, and all programmes incorporate elements of work-based learning, work placement, internship or other opportunities for students to gain valuable experience of work as part of their study. Graduate attributes are developed through specific modules, as timetabled workshops or as part of the work-based induction programme in foundation degrees. Recent industrial experience and active engagement within their respective sector(s) are an important criterion for the appointment of academic staff and many staff continue to spend part of their time engaged in industry or with influential groups within their sectors. This level of engagement with industry and currency of experience ensures that skills development and practice delivered within, or in addition to programmes, are both up to date and relevant. Staff are encouraged to undertake time back in industry to ensure the currency of their vocational specialisms, which is also a target incorporated into each personal development review.

The College operates several industrial enterprises on the campus and students engage in these to develop their practical skills and knowledge in areas such as health and safety, animal handling and specialist equipment operation. In addition, the College Careers Service provides support to students by providing advice and guidance on career planning; graduate skill development, including preparation for interviews and assessment centres; and assisting students in finding work experience and graduate placements.

Between 2016/17 and 2017/18, the College has devised a range of innovative enhancement activities designed to promote the employability of its students. These include providing opportunities for students to gain additional industry recognised qualifications and certification alongside their academic degrees; the support given to students to use the strong industrial links the College has to engage with industry as part of their final-year projects; and a graduate trainee programme, which is designed to support students into careers in teaching. The successes of these measures are reflected in the College's DLHE data, with an average of 85% full-time graduates going onto employment and/or further study within 6 months between 2015 and 2017. This success is further emphasised by the fact that the College has a high proportion of students with learning difficulties and disabilities relative to the size of its student population, signifying the success the increased pastoral and learning support has had in advancing employability for such students in recent years.

Ensuring that UCR graduates progress into appropriate, fulfilling and sustainable employment is a key goal for the College. In the most recent DLHE data (2016/17 release), the average UCR graduate salary is £25,000 (up from £23,000 in 2015/16), which is higher than the national average at £22,500[8]. Additional factors influencing our successful graduate employability quotient are our strong links with industry, with the College supporting these enterprises through a wide range of mechanisms. These include informal direct contact with tutors and course managers; invitations to employers as critical friends to comment on, review, inform and validate the development of new

[8] https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/28-06-2018/sfr250-higher-education-leaver-statistics-employment

and existing programmes; running frequent stakeholder events; using employers to develop student projects; and the more traditional placement of students for work-based learning and internships. Indeed, the management and use of long-term strategic relationships with external stakeholders such as employers, to enhance the student experience was highlighted as good practice by the QAA[9].

In April 2018, we were awarded a Matrix Standard for the information and guidance we provide our current and prospective students. The accreditation review highlighted several areas of good practice during the three-day assessment, including the effective working relationship between the support service areas and curriculum staff supported by the use of the ProMonitor/ProSolutions system; staff commitment to providing accurate and high-quality impartial advice and guidance to applicants and students and how well the College responded to feedback input by students through the use of surveys. Indeed, the conclusions drawn from the audit stated that "*The College has demonstrated that it meets all areas of the standard. Staff from the different departments work well together and provide impartial advice to help ensure students are provided with support they need to achieve their goals"*[10].

4.2 Employability and Transferable Skills (SO2)

The development of knowledge, skills and attributes that are most highly-valued by employers and enhance student personal and/or professional lives is firmly embedded in our programmes and was a strategic focus of our curriculum portfolio review undertaken initially in 2013 and again in 2016. We apply a multi-faceted approach to employability, being founded on four main areas of activity: curriculum design, employer engagement, extracurricular activity, and the provision of dedicated careers advice and guidance, all of which work in tandem to deliver an integrated approach to student employability. At validation, our undergraduate modular framework tests the integration of key transferable, graduate skills with subject-specific skills. Programme design is actively informed by engagement with employers, either individually or through department-level industry consultations and the use of external professional advisors for each curriculum area. Employability and transferable skills are also embedded within assessment design and outlined in assessment brief templates.

External examiners have unceasingly confirmed that the academic standards of the programmes of study offered by the College are appropriate to their related awards and are kept under constant review to ensure the continued validity of the awards and that student achievement is commensurate with these. Indeed, in many cases, the standards were noted as being above those of students studying at other institutions of which external examiners had experience. A common theme of good practice from our 2017-18 external examiner reports was the industry links and enhancement activities available for students which support the development of graduate attributes. For example, through direct industry links provided by tutors, our animal science students have the opportunity to work with Chester Zoo through work placement and internship opportunities and Horticulture students participate in a green infrastructure assessment of a local council area, and compete annually in national competitions. Indeed, our Horticulture students were successful in securing awards in 2017/18 at the Ascot Spring Flower Show and RHS Tatton Flower Show, gaining prestigious bronze and silver medals respectively.

Shannon Crewe is a recent shining example of the successes such collaborative industry partnerships bring to our graduates and the ensuing transferable skills and attributes they develop. Shannon completed her BSc (Top-up) in Animal Management (Behaviour and Welfare) and the vocational skills and knowledge Shannon honed whilst on placement at Chester Zoo enabled her to graduate with a first-class degree and secure employment in South Africa with *Care for Wild Africa*, the world's largest specialist facility for the rescue and rehabilitation of orphaned Rhinos. Our consultation links with zoos have also seen us secure funding for collaborative captive breeding programmes for a range of animals within our animal collection, and allowed a number of our final

[9] Reaseheath College QAA HER - Commentary on the Theme: Student Employability (May, 2014)

[10] Matrix Standard Accreditation Review Report (April, 2018)

year students to undertake scholarships in conjunction with the British and Irish Association for Zoos and Aquaria (BIAZA), which has also led to three peer-reviewed publications in zoological journals.

Employer involvement in programme delivery takes the form of guest lectures and the setting and assessment of live project briefs. Employers also host placement opportunities which are part of the curriculum and take the form of short placements and internships. All programmes incorporate the opportunity for work experience as part of a vocational programme, which enables undergraduates to undertake at least 5 weeks of supervised work experience which is credit-bearing. Extracurricular placements, and part-time work or volunteering facilitated by our dedicated HE Careers and Work Placements Team provide additional opportunities for the development of transferable skills. Students are supported with job applications, CVs and interview preparation and over 50 employers contribute annually to careers fairs, or as visiting speakers.

At the level of the individual, we engage students in the development of graduate attributes through a number of key strands, embedded in the curriculum and in enhancement activities, including understanding what employability skills and graduate attributes are from an employer perspective; testing themselves personally against these skills and attributes, and engaging with employers and being able to develop practice in the workplace.

The College makes concerted efforts to support students in engaging with industry as part of their final year research projects. There are many recent examples where students have worked closely with a company to address specific operational and real-life issues. Recent projects include the development of a high protein fatless biscuit for one of the College's commercial customers within our Food Innovation department. There are numerous approaches to industrial research and development at UCR where companies can use our specialist facilities to conduct their own feasibility studies and product development, or HE students can carry out trials for companies.

Some outstanding alumni successes have resulted from this well-established employer engagement strategy. Robert Yardley is an award-winning example; while studying on the part-time FdSc Agriculture programme, Rob won the Oxford Farming Conference scholarship. At the conference he took full advantage of the scholarship programme and developed contacts with several influential figures within the UK and global agricultural industry. The contacts he developed, both personally and through UCR, allowed him to be instrumental in bringing hi-tech arable machinery to the UK for Pottinger, who then ran ground-breaking trials on the Reaseheath farm. Ultimately, he was headhunted by one of the largest farming companies in the UK, Velcourt Ltd, to join their Farm Managers programme. Since then he has managed a variety of large farms and estates around the UK and is currently managing a mixed arable enterprise in Yorkshire. While studying at undergraduate level, Rob was invited to provide industry advice internationally, travelling to Ukraine with Syngenta to advise Ukrainian farmers on how to manage their businesses to meet the requirements of the global grain markets.

The College is currently engaged in several live research projects, led by the Reaseheath Agricultural Development Agency (RADA) as an employer-facing unit. The outcomes of this work directly benefit the employers we work with and inform our teaching. One example is the improvement of mobility in cattle. Working with the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB), the Healthy Feet Programme has led to the British dairy industry developing a national control programme focused on prevention rather than just cure of lameness in cattle based on our project work. Students across diverse curricula benefit from these activities being based at Reaseheath, and have access to a level of expertise that would not be available without us hosting this type of empirical research. The College has other DEFRA funded applied research and trials work, including a Horticulture project, investigating the effects of LED lighting and facility design on the ripening rates of tomatoes. This project has been of particular value to the BSc Applied Plant Science and Production Technology students, improving student understanding of greenhouse specification and its impact on production rates – currently a topical issue within the sector.

In a challenging marketplace for graduates across the UK, the College has enjoyed positive employment outcomes. The overwhelming majority of our students seek employment in and around

Chester, the North West and North East Wales regions upon completion of their studies. A high proportion of our student population are defined as 'disadvantaged', and are more likely to seek employment within the regions where they have studied. However, all these areas are classified as economically depressed and employment opportunities are constrained, particularly those roles which are categorised by the DLHE as 'graduate level'. Indeed, regional and local economic growth statistics published by the Government in August 2016 show that in the period 2013-2016, Gross Value Added (GVA) growth by UK region averaged 16%. However, the North West region had the third slowest growth rate in the entire UK of just 11.1%. In the period since 2013, the North West has lost some 400,000 public sector jobs and three of the country's 'top twelve struggling cities' are located in the North West[11] .

There is evidence that in many the College's discipline areas, the TEF metrics are not served well by the nature of the DLHE Survey. For example, a substantial number of our graduates seek to enter careers in animal/plant science roles, which often require an apprenticeship-style entry process to the profession through low-skilled roles after graduation. This context is mirrored within a significant proportion of our animal science graduates who often seek employment in zoological institutions, where individuals require a postgraduate qualification, but the job itself is unhelpfully graded in the DLHE Survey as being 'non-graduate'. The College hopes that the new question structures within the graduate outcomes survey, with a focus on a graduate's own definitions of the meaningfulness of their employment status, will combine with an improved emphasis on entrepreneurial outcomes to give a more accurate representation of destinations sought by graduates with our particular profile.

'Agriculture and related subjects' has relatively few students compared to other subject areas across UK HE providers[12] and, in addition, being benchmarked against general further education colleges and not similar specialist land-based institutions, does not provide a fair judgement or comparison on our employment metrics. Like many further education institutions, UCR also operates some of its programmes with relatively small numbers. Consequently, employment metrics derived from the DLHE data are not wholly reflective of actual student destinations. This number also misrepresents the true numbers of Reaseheath graduates working overseas (12.5% [n=12] - derived across Agriculture, Animal Management and Equine curricula), since leavers working abroad are harder to contact. However, the College feels that the implementation of the centralised Graduate Outcomes Survey and a shift to longitudinal review should provide a richer and more valid picture of UCR graduate performance in the labour market, particularly as careers with the land-based sector typically take longer to come to fruition.

Our TEF metrics demonstrate that overall, students progress well into employment or further study. However, unfortunately, not all professions which are undoubtedly highly skilled in nature are systematically included in the current employment categorisations, as defined by the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC). Furthermore, upon reviewing our highly skilled and further study core metrics, we found some discrepancies in the categorisation of the types of jobs our graduates take up upon leaving us and the interpretation and classification of information the survey provider has received from respondents of the survey (for example, dairy herd managers being classified as farmers). In re-classifying these professions, we believe that our single negative flag for year 3 would be removed, subsequently reducing our core flag to a single aggregated negative flag. However, if a similar methodology was to be applied to our 2016 data (Year 1), the results this analysis produced may well remove the negative flag entirely from our core data, thus portraying a very different, and what we consider to be a more realistic, picture of our graduate destinations data.

4.3 Positive Outcomes for All (SO3)

Parallel to the College's strategic enhancement of employability through engagement with industry-led research, the College also embarked on a number of initiatives between 2015 and 2017, aimed at embedding the development of graduate attributes within the curriculum. The ultimate aim of this initiative was to provide a focused approach to employability as a key element of our strategy to enhance the student experience. These activities included the development of a series of

[11] House of Commons Library Briefing Paper – Regional and Local Economic Growth Statistics (December 2017)
[12] UCAS End of Cycle Report 2017; GuildHE - AGCAS: Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services

employability outcomes, which are articulated against the specified intended learning outcomes across each level of study within the curriculum. These embedded employability skills aim to foster and develop a culture of progression and life-long learning. The themes developed across each award level then allow students to recognise their own personal, academic and career development achievements in completing their assessed learning outcomes. This approach had a particularly positive impact on our foundation degree students, attributed to the vocational context of their provision, as it allowed individual performance to be monitored within the construct of employability skills development.

We deliver an extended induction period for new higher education students to support their initial transition to higher education supporting personal, professional and academic development alongside social affiliation. This induction programme includes a combination of centrally organised and subject-specific activities to support students in the early stages of their studies. To avoid information overload at the initial stages, the induction package includes an initial orientation in week one, followed by a 2-week extended induction period, which includes tutorials and seminars to discuss expectations, study skills, learning styles and personal development and introduces the services and support they can access as higher education students.

The induction process includes a formative assessment to prepare students for the requirements of summative assessment and a number of personal tutorials to provide tutors and students with an early indication of expectations, academic level and areas where individual support may be required. These extended induction initiatives have been highly successful, particularly to support priority groups such as young students, those from low-participation areas and those in receipt of DSA. In our 2017-18 internal induction survey, 96% of higher education students stated they knew where to get help if they needed it and 95% stated that, following induction, they felt more confident about their course.

Our electronic attendance system is used amongst other student indicators to assist early identification of student concerns and offer an appropriate and tailored level of support to improve retention, achievement and the student experience. The system involves identifying student concerns and the implementation of targeted interventions. Student concerns are discussed within course teams and support officers on a weekly basis. Concerns are logged on a central system and categorised according to the type of concern and assigned a level of risk. Actions are initiated appropriate to the level of risk and monitored on a regular basis. Our student record system provides joined-up support for tutors in monitoring 'at risk' students and provides enhanced monitoring and support for students in priority groups such as those receiving DSA and those from low participation areas or other ethnicity groups. Furthermore, a revised tutorial system (providing distinctive guidance for staff on the needs of students across each level of undergraduate study) was created for implementation from 2017/18 in collaboration with the HE StAR Council. Students clearly identified a preferred 'timeline' for employability provision and suggested changes in practice that would improve the experience for them. Employability is developed through a systematically planned, balanced focus on activities which enhance attributes, knowledge, skills and communication across each level. External organisations, especially employers, and careers guidance staff play a key role in educating students about the difference between skills, abilities and attitudes to increase their prospects of securing graduate employment.

Our work in this area is currently being brought together in the development of a '*Keys to Success'* personal interactive portfolio in partnership with students, careers and wellbeing teams. This is being designed to support students to develop a better understanding of their own skills and abilities, identify areas for development and assemble personalised evidence related to their acquisition of personal, employability and digital skills. These are key areas for exploration during personal tutor meetings where students are encouraged to reflect upon and evaluate their own development. As with many HE providers, UCR recognises the recent increase in students presenting with issues surrounding their mental health and wellbeing. Our students have immediate access to specially trained wellbeing staff and professional counsellors to provide holistic professional care and support when it is needed most. Our unwavering commitment to providing a culture of continuous enhancement and collaboration for our students, enabling them to develop the knowledge and skills

which prepare them for success in work and life was recently celebrated in the College being shortlisted for the Association of Colleges Mental Health and Wellbeing Beacon Award In November 2018. This accolade recognises the important work UCR is doing to support the mental health and wellbeing of both its students and staff. Our support for residential students has also been recognised in our 2018 Ofsted residential care standards inspection where we received an 'outstanding' rating with supporting comments that "outstanding staff and college systems help students to settle into college life and make successful moves to their chosen work or study destinations"[13]. This recognition exemplifies the supportive and enabling culture of Reaseheath across all aspects of our provision, further solidifying our position as a Silver-level institution.

5. STUDENT CONSULTATION

Students make a major contribution to the life and work of UCR. Their feedback is invaluable, and we empower them to use their voice to promote positive change. As part of the TEF Year 4 submission, we invited students to comment about any aspects of their programme they wished to mention. By means of example, we received the following comments from the students[14]:

"As undergraduates we're encouraged to be involved with our learning programme. We have debates on topics that interest us and visit advanced and diverse agricultural businesses. We're also looking forward to a study tour to Canada, which will give us a real insight into the global industry."

Student currently studying BSc (Hons) Agricultural Business Management

"My course has enabled me to develop transferable skills which are essential for professional work or further study and this has allowed me to keep my career options open. All my lecturers are very supportive and the small group sizes allows for a more personal and supportive experience"

Student currently studying FdSc Equine Physical Therapies and Rehabilitation

"I have massive respect for the staff at Reaseheath. The quality of knowledge transfer is superb and the support I receive helps to reinforce my passion and give me the drive to pursue my goals."

Student currently studying BSc (Hons) Wildlife Conservation and Ecology

6. CONCLUSION

University Centre Reaseheath is very proud of its strong reputation of providing an academically supportive and engaging learning environment for all of its students, irrespective and inclusive of their backgrounds, abilities and prior experiences. UCR articulates employer engagement in the design, quality assurance and delivery of its HE and offers a range of programmes, which aim to develop the higher-level vocational skills that are required by industry to prepare students to enter employment or enhance the prospects of those already in the workplace. The relationship with employers enables students to enhance their skills by studying and working in an environment that offers industry-standard facilities and practical experience. Our approaches to teaching and assessment draw on staff experience and enable the delivery of real-world practice. Our contextualisation of learning and teaching materials and advanced use of the VLE maximise student engagement and prepare students for progression into industry. These objectives can only be achieved by us knowing our students individually: by understanding their past experiences, skills and capabilities and tailoring our support, academic and pastoral, to help them to reach their potential. Our development of positive relationships creates a strong collective sense of community where students are genuine partners in their learning experience. Central to our continued success is a hugely committed body of staff, who share in our mission and place the highest value in consistently delivering an outstanding learning experience. We firmly believe that University Centre Reaseheath meets the descriptor for a Silver TEF rating and commend it for your consideration.

[13] Reaseheath College – Ofsted residential care standards inspection 2018 available at: https://www.reaseheath.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Reaseheath-FE-College-Ofsted-Report-Sept-17.pdf

[14] Student consultation incorporated permission requests for comments to be used within the TEF provider submission, thereby addressing any data privacy concerns.