




UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

A high-angle photograph of four students (three men and one woman) sitting around a light-colored wooden desk, studying together. They are looking at various books, papers, and a laptop. A modern white desk lamp is positioned over the desk. The students are dressed in casual attire. The overall atmosphere is one of focused academic collaboration.

# TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK 2017

## INTRODUCTION: FOREWORDS

### Professor Sir David Eastwood

**At the University of Birmingham education is a partnership. We are a broad research-led institution and our distinctive approach to teaching and learning is reflected in our Gold award in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).**

Our TEF submission reflects Birmingham's research-intensive ethos, which underpins our commitment to nurture independent learners and outstanding graduates who are analytical and critical in their thinking and both evidence-based and ethics-aware in their actions. Our approach to research-led education can be defined by its three constituent pillars: research-informed teaching, research-based learning, and researcher education.

The quality of our teaching and our approach to supporting and recognising teaching excellence are major contributors to outstanding student satisfaction, with 'Teaching on My Course' rated at over 90% in the National Student Survey. Our commitment to excellent teaching was also recognised in our outstanding 2016 QAA Higher Education Review.

Students from all backgrounds, cultures, and disciplines live and learn alongside one another here. First-class contemporary integrated spaces reflect continuous investment – more than £200 million over the TEF assessment period alone – in physical and digital resources to ensure our students are supported to reach the highest levels of engagement and achievement, backed by rigorous quality assurance processes.

Investing heavily in our Employability Strategy means students have access to sector-leading employability support, benefiting from the wisdom of industry experts who are defining and redefining knowledge at the forefront of their fields. Our employability rate is consistently above 94% across each year of the TEF metrics and we currently rank fourth highest (excluding specialist institutions) for graduate employability in the UK.

With a curriculum founded on the principle of offering 'depth, breadth, quality and challenge' we strive to ensure all students are engaged in transformational learning experiences. Independent study and peer-to-peer learning are central to our mission, while our strategy to support personalised learning ranges from academic and pastoral support to intra – and extra – curricular activities, all designed to ensure our students make a successful transition to, and succeed in, higher education

Research-intensive universities such as Birmingham deliver an outstanding student experience in which teaching is enhanced by world-class research and facilities. In an ever-more complex world, original thinking will be in high demand and we are proud that our students leave Birmingham equipped to succeed and thrive.



*Professor Sir David Eastwood,  
Vice-Chancellor and Principal*

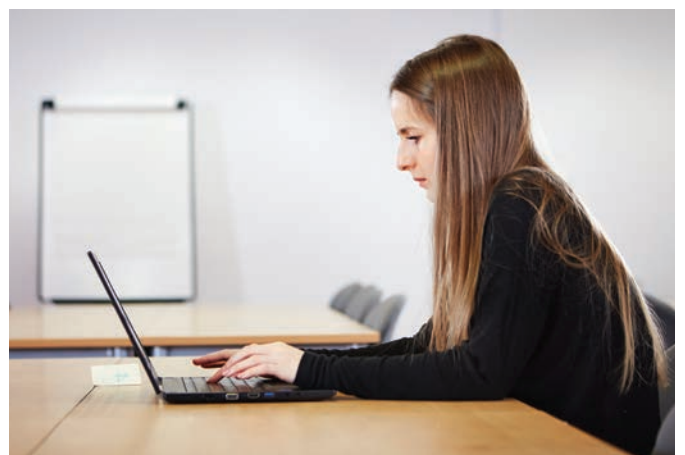






## Guild of Students

We at the Guild continually strive to ensure that the educational experience of all Birmingham students is the best it can be. Through our continued work with the University, we consistently work to improve teaching quality, provide students with better resources, and teach them the skills to shape their own future. It is through continued collaboration and student input and feedback that these things are achieved. We are incredibly pleased to see that the student voice continues to shape and enhance the educational experience at the University of Birmingham.



‘... a school of universal instruction, not confined to any particular branch of knowledge but taking all knowledge in its province; a place in which those who come to teach shall continue to learn and which the work... of original research shall be continuously carried out.’

Joseph Chamberlain, Founder and First University of Birmingham Chancellor, 1900



‘We... draw on the richness of our research expertise and breadth of our disciplines to offer new learning experiences to our students.’



## SECTION ONE:

# OVERVIEW

The University of Birmingham is proud of its civic roots and mission. Granted a Royal Charter in 1900, the University has remained true to Joseph Chamberlain's founding vision for '...a school of universal instruction, not confined to any particular branch of knowledge but taking all knowledge in its province; a place in which those who come to teach shall continue to learn and which the work... of original research shall be continuously carried out.' We have since grown into one of the largest universities in the UK covering a comprehensive range of disciplines. We offer both academic and vocational programmes, and admit one of the more diverse student populations in the Russell Group. In 2015/16 our undergraduate student population totalled 21,495 with 95% studying full time, 80.8% from state schools, 20% from disadvantaged backgrounds (Polar Quintiles 1 and 2), 28% BME, 54% female, 14.2% mature learners, 10.6% with a recorded disability and 10.4% international (non-EU). In this overview, we highlight key features of our strategy and its impacts, and consider specific aspects of the core and split metrics. In the sections that follow, we provide evidence against the three Aspects of Quality. This submission has been jointly authored by the University and our Guild of Students.

The University of Birmingham is a research-intensive institution with a strong belief in a research-led education to underpin the development of independent learners and outstanding graduates. In REF 2014, 81% of our research was rated as internationally excellent or world leading. We submitted 81% (1,119 headcount) of eligible research-active staff, 92.9% of whom are on research and teaching contracts ensuring that our academic expertise supports and enhances student learning. The quality of our teaching is recognised consistently by our students. The score of 90.3% for 'teaching on my course' exceeds our TEF benchmark and reflects improvement in this metric over a number of years.

We are a vibrant and integrated academic community centred on an outstanding campus. We invest continuously in our physical and digital resources to ensure that students are supported to reach the highest levels of engagement and achievement. An exceptional extra-curricular offer adds further richness to the learning environment for students who are engaged in a wide variety of award-winning formal and informal learning opportunities. High levels of student engagement have contributed to our strong non-continuation rate (3.5%), which exceeds an already high benchmark.

We have put in place outstanding quality assurance processes to ensure students and employers can have confidence in our standards. This strategy was endorsed in our most recent (2016) QAA Higher Education Review (HER) where we achieved the most positive outcome of all institutions in the UK to date: two commendations, nine highlighted areas of good practice and – importantly – no recommendations for required improvements. The quality of our provision has also been recognised through awards of *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* University of the Year in 2013/14 and *The Times* and *The Sunday Times* University of the Year for Graduate Employment in 2016. Domestic league tables provide

further evidence of sustained progress in quality with a rise in *the Guardian* from 30th (2011) to 13th (2017).

Our strategic framework guides our approach to Education in that 'We... draw on the richness of our research expertise and breadth of our disciplines to offer new learning experiences to our students.' The success of that approach can be seen in the success of our graduates. As the TEF metrics demonstrate, we have sector-leading employability outcomes that not only exceed our benchmark but result in double flagged achievements across every split metric for highly skilled employment or further study. This is the outcome of our strategy to secure success across our diverse student population, thus aligning with the broad civic mission of our founder. We are ranked fourth in the UK (excluding specialist institutions) for Graduate Prospects in *The Complete University Guide 2017* although we have an average intake tariff 27% lower than the three institutions above us in this ranking. Significant investment in our pioneering A2B widening participation initiative has contributed to this outcome with A2B students gaining 87% graduate employability against a University average of 85.3% (2014/15 cohort data). Our DLHE data indicate that our graduates exceed the sector average graduate employment rate in every English region (12/13, 13/14 and 14/15 cohort data). These achievements signal strong value-added and underscore the distance travelled by Birmingham students compared to those at the other institutions.

Further robust evidence of value-added can be seen in the success of our students in their degree outcomes. In its analysis of the relationship between tariff score and degree outcome, *the Guardian* (2017) confirmed the University's position at tenth in the UK for value-added. To place this outcome in context, the University of Birmingham is also ranked eighth in *The Times* national league table (2016) for the award of upper second or first class honours degrees. Given the 2016 QAA HER endorsement of the quality-assurance processes that were in place throughout the TEF assessment period, we are confident that these outcomes are grounded in the absolute and benchmarked excellence of undergraduate education at the University of Birmingham.

In 2015/16 our undergraduate student population totalled

# 21,495



## Contextualising our performance against the core and split metrics

Our TEF metrics demonstrate the quality of our education for all students in the areas of teaching, retention, attainment and employment outcomes. We have two positive flags (Highly Skilled Employability and Teaching on my course) and all but one of our core metrics exceeds benchmark.

**Teaching on my course:** The quality of our teaching is recognised by a positive performance against benchmark across all years and splits, and a sustained core metric performance of over 90% across the period. We provide further detail in Section 2.

**Assessment and Feedback:** Our NSS scores in this area are below our aspirations. Over the TEF assessment period, we have introduced a number of initiatives to address the issues identified in the metrics (detail in Section 2d), but we are aware that we have more to do. The TEF data are helpful in further refining our strategy as they provide more detailed information upon which we can act; for example, whilst disadvantaged students are more satisfied than their non-disadvantaged counterparts they remain below benchmark. We need to understand this and other issues in greater depth and, in one initiative, we are working with the Guild of Students on a specific project to address gender differences in satisfaction. Despite the challenges flagged in this metric however, lower student satisfaction with assessment and feedback has not impacted negatively on student attainment and outcomes or overall satisfaction with teaching and academic support. We have a curriculum and assessment framework that is designed to stretch and challenge and we acknowledge that this can lead to student discomfort. Nonetheless, excellent outcomes seem to confirm the value of this approach.

**Academic Support:** During the TEF period we have invested in our tutorial and support structures, with a focus on transition to university and the inclusion of the Senior University Tutor as a member of the senior leadership team. We also have an extensive network of support across the University (see Section 3). As a result, we have consistently scored above benchmark for this measure and across all splits. The only exception is part-time disabled students and we have investigated this negative flag. Our part-time students are largely clustered on one foundation programme which is taught collaboratively off-campus. The split represents a population of 19 students over three years and we continue to collaborate with our programme partner to address these issues.

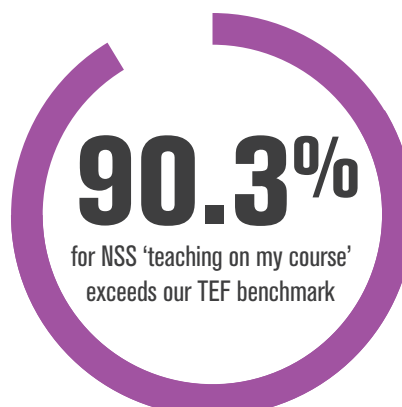
**Non-continuation:** We consistently outperform our core benchmark for non-continuation and we remain committed to improvement. We sit near the top of the achievement range and have a very high institutional benchmark for this measure, meaning that a non-continuation rate of 1.7% would have been required to achieve a flag. This is challenging

given our commitment to WP, accepting a range of qualifications at entry, and breadth of subject provision. Data not yet released will also show an improvement in retention over the past two years. We provide further detail in Section 3.

**Employment or Further Study:** We outperform our benchmark for employability and our institutional focus has been on highly skilled employability. Major strategic investment to integrate employability into teaching programmes has resulted in increases to employability and graduate employability. We provide further detail in Section 4.

**Highly skilled employability:** This metric underscores the outstanding impact of a University of Birmingham education with double positive flags for performance against benchmark across all splits. We have invested over £4million in our Employability Strategy since 2012 with the aim of providing students with access to sector-leading employability support. As part of this initiative, we established our Careers Network as a central coordination centre for initiatives and support across all five Colleges. This strategy impacted on improving our highly skilled employment rate which has increased from an already high 80.8% for the cohort leaving in 2011/12 to 85.3% for the cohort leaving in 2014/15 (latest DHLE data) (further detail in Section 4).

**In summary,** we can provide evidence that education at the University of Birmingham meets the descriptor of 'outstanding'. In the sections that follow, we provide greater detail on the numerous ways in which strategies on teaching, research, environment and resources have supported our students to achieve the ambitious, sector-leading outcomes that are evident in the TEF metrics. In each section we identify our strategic aims, outline actions and initiatives, and provide evidence of their impact. In order to demonstrate how our strategies are adapted to meet the needs of students in different disciplines, we have selected illustrative examples from across our five academic Colleges: Arts and Law, Engineering and Physical Sciences, Life and Environmental Sciences, Medical and Dental Sciences, and Social Sciences. The strength of this college model is that it allows us to tailor actions to disciplinary needs at a local level.





Our TEF metrics demonstrate the quality of our education for all students in the areas of teaching, retention, attainment and employment outcomes.

We have made major strategic investment to integrate employability into teaching programmes; this has resulted in increases to employability and graduate employability.



## SECTION TWO:

# TEACHING QUALITY

### Rigour and stretch

A University of Birmingham education is designed to challenge and stretch all students. Courses and modules are based on cutting-edge research (see Section 3), developed through employer input (see Section 4) and delivered through evidence-based teaching. Our curriculum is founded on the principle of offering 'depth, breadth, quality and challenge' to ensure all students are engaged in transformational learning experiences leading to outstanding outcomes.

A key feature of our curriculum design is choice and the opportunity for students to gain both depth of understanding and breadth of insight. For example, a cross-University initiative encourages all first-year students to study up to 20 credits outside their main discipline ('Widening Horizons') drawn from our comprehensive catalogue of modules. By providing choice within and beyond the main discipline, selecting rigorous research-led curriculum content and using a wide range of teaching methods including interactive lectures, seminars, flipped delivery, online discussion fora, debates, and peer assessment, we ensure students are challenged throughout their period of study. Our strategy is to design courses and assessment that support students to become independent, self-motivated and reflective learners and they develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to achieve outstanding employment outcomes.

In the College of Social Sciences, we have partnered with Capgemini to design the University of Birmingham Capgemini Community Challenge, which takes place at Capgemini's world-renowned client-solutions facilities. Students undertake tangible solutions-based consultancy projects for third-sector clients with the support of Capgemini mentors and an advice session with the Corporate Vice President. This represents Capgemini's largest single investment into any university partnership in the UK. The programme was nominated for an award by the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services at the Targetjobs National Graduate Awards, and receives outstanding feedback from students. In the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences, our links with Aston Martin provide second-year undergraduates with the opportunity to inspect and dismantle an Aston Martin DB9, and then present their findings to an Aston Martin representative. Students also benefit from curriculum design and teaching led by three senior visiting industrial professors sponsored by the Royal Academy of Engineering. In Arts and Law, our Centre for Professional Legal Education and Research (CEPLER) is designed to enhance students' employability in addition to developing innovative approaches to the legal curriculum and fostering world class research on legal practice and education. In 2015/16, CEPLER supported 277 students to engage in pro bono work alongside our legal partners. Students author working papers which are published by CEPLER, enabling students to synthesise professional and research-led experiences and providing a resource available to other students in and beyond our University.

As part of our strategy to provide rigour and challenge, we ensure that our students are engaged with highly-cited academic experts alongside experts from industry who are defining and redefining knowledge at the forefront of their fields. In the College of Arts and Law on the BA English programme, staff from our internationally renowned Shakespeare Institute in Stratford-upon-Avon contribute to the design and delivery of modules across all years of study. In the College of Life and Environmental Sciences, teaching is co-delivered by organisations ranging from the PGA, NHS clinicians and Natural England. In Medical and Dental Sciences, students study alongside staff in research teams that are finding solutions to major health challenges of modern society ranging from antimicrobial resistance, to improving health in old age and providing health solutions for rare diseases. In Engineering and Physical Sciences, research-active particle physics staff do not simply read about the groundbreaking research in CERN to inform their teaching, they are actively engaged in that research at CERN and students visit to hear about the research first-hand. Our entire suite of UG programmes in the School of Chemical Engineering is informed by our primary research on the emerging field of 'Formulation Engineering' and working with employers such as Mondelez and Procter & Gamble has helped to maintain strong student recruitment and employment. In each of these examples, it is the engagement of top-class researchers and employers in course design and delivery that contributes to outstanding student outcomes (see Section 3).

The quality of our provision and academic standards has received strong external validation. Our 2016 QAA HER report noted nine areas of good practice and two commendations; external examiners regularly endorse our academic standards; and approximately 40 Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) accredit our programmes. These external endorsements of our robust academic standards sit alongside strong positive outcomes for all students as evidenced in our TEF metrics which are above benchmark across almost every split for employability and highlight skilled employment.

### Student engagement

Active student engagement in education is pivotal to our provision and the student voice is at the heart of our strategy. We have, therefore, designed systems that ensure students have a strong voice across all aspects of our education provision.

Our Student Representation System (SRS) is an important means by which students engage in their studies and become authentic partners in their education. Reps are elected by the student population and are supported by the Guild of Students in partnership with the University. Student representation is coordinated by a joint University-Guild committee co-chaired by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) and the Guild Vice-President (Education). Students are represented by fellow



students at all levels including in Schools and Colleges, at Senate and Council (and their sub-committees), in VC integrated reviews (our periodic review of all subjects which considers teaching and research together) as well as a joint twice-termly meeting of the Guild sabbatical team and the University Executive Board. The Guild provides dedicated training and support and Schools provide further training where specific discipline-related needs are identified; for example, the College of Life and Environmental Sciences has established its own Rep Academy.

The annual Student Voice Report is a further important mechanism through which the collective student voice is heard and prioritised and this is considered formally at the main University Education Committee. This report was initiated by the Guild of Students as a means of capturing key issues of concern and/or interest to the student body on a regular basis and following progress on those issues over time. Since 2014/15, 386 major recommendations have been addressed as a result of the student representation system; for example, several recommendations in 2015/16 related to provision for Joint Honours students, and from 2016/17 we have implemented a policy that all Joint Honours students will have a nominated tutor or contact in their second department, in addition to the Personal Tutor in their 'home' department.

We also ensure student views are prioritised by putting in place institution-wide annual feedback surveys (in addition to NSS), ad hoc surveys, and focus groups. The outcomes of all student consultations are scrutinised in conjunction with students through the committee systems. These operate at every level of the organisation ranging from individual course committees and task and finish groups to central executive committees. As an example of responding to student views expressed in these fora, an investment of £60million has been made in a new library (see Section 3). Students were involved in all stages of this project and now that the new library is fully operational, they continue to shape the ways in which the facility will develop to further support their learning.

Students have multiple opportunities to express their views and this includes views on the detail of programme provision. For example, the College of Medical and Dental Sciences introduced a BMedSci in Health Management and Leadership as a result of recommendations made by MBChB students who wanted to pursue careers in general practice and had identified a gap in their skills and knowledge. Government and Society responded to student concerns in 2014/15 regarding the 40-credit dissertation by introducing a new independent study module of 20 credits. This was approved in 2015/16 and will go live in September 2017.

Our strategy in programme design is to develop students as independent learners who can be successful in their education and future employment. We aim to deliver optimal levels of contact time relevant to the norms and requirements of individual disciplines and their learning outcomes. Contact time ranges from lectures to individual tutorials to small group teaching and student-led learning, and is further optimised through the

provision of interactive digital content (eg, Canvas and Panopto – see Section 3). This approach is consistent with our belief in research-led education and developing a culture that promotes independent learning.

The data suggest that our strategy has been successful because our students secure outstanding outcomes. We exceed our TEF benchmarks for both 'Teaching on my course' (across all years and all splits) and non-continuation. In addition, our 2016 QAA HER report praises specific strategies that contribute directly to our outcomes. For example, our formal and informal discussion networks were identified as an aspect of good practice because they 'contribute to the enhancement of student learning opportunities'. Other strengths included providing 'opportunities at all levels for students to provide feedback on their student experience' and timeliness in 'making changes on the basis of this feedback'.

## Valuing teaching

An outstanding student learning experience is underpinned by outstanding teaching. In the Valuing Teaching at Birmingham project (2013) we reviewed the University's approach to valuing and celebrating teaching. This was a pillar of our strategic aim to ensure we are able to offer education at a quality that is amongst the best in the sector and the project crystallised our approach to providing outstanding development opportunities and facilitating innovation in teaching.

In 2014, we created the institutional Teaching Academy (TA). The TA is our locus of expertise on effective and innovative learning and teaching. It provides a forum for the widespread dissemination of new ideas and the development of teaching knowledge and skills. For example, the TA organises an annual open conference that is supplemented by our in-house teaching-focussed journal: 'Education in Practice'. Themes that formed the focus of TA activity across the assessment period include 'the student experience' (2015), and 'educational innovation' (2014). Internationally, the University is a founding member of Universitas 21 and most recently has led the annual Education and Innovation conference to identify new approaches to education in research-intensive universities. Active participation in this global network ensures that our teaching staff engage in and lead best international evidence-based practice.

Support for professional development begins as soon as staff join us. 93% of our Teaching and Research staff hold PhDs and all newly appointed lecturers are required to undertake the University's Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PCAP) (from 2016 re-named PGCert in Higher Education). This qualification provides our staff with a comprehensive preparation for the teaching, learning and assessment aspects of their role, supporting them to build the expertise, confidence and practical skills required for excellent teaching. To support ongoing professional development we also make the PCAP available to experienced teaching staff. Our 'Beacon' professional recognition

scheme (introduced in 2015) supports staff to gain Higher Education Academy Fellowships. During the assessment period we registered 149 HEA Associate Fellows, 295 Fellows, 17 Senior Fellows and two Principle Fellows. As of 2014/15, 45% of our staff had a HESA-recognised teaching qualification. Our institutional target is to ensure that 75% of staff hold a HESA-recognised teaching qualification by 2020 and, in the future, we plan to go beyond what we regard as this minimal level of qualification.

Teaching Academy 'Distinguished Fellows' are individuals who have made a significant contribution to the enhancement of student learning. They play a critical institutional role in supporting the development of teaching staff and disseminating good practice. Our peer observation scheme has been adopted by all Colleges as an important professional development tool and the strength of this scheme was acknowledged in our 2016 QAA HER report. Our online digital support tool, the Professional Development Gateway (established in 2016) provides staff with additional training modules, academic case studies, student feedback and research evidence.

We recognise talented academics who dedicate their careers to teaching excellence through the 'teaching-focused career-pathway'. We have invested £9.9million in teaching-focussed appointments and promotions over the TEF period. Staff on the teaching-focused pathway are full participants in our research culture to ensure that cutting-edge research and teaching are mutually enhancing. Teaching-focussed staff have the same career progression opportunities as those on the research-focussed pathways, including promotion to Reader and Professor, and the opportunity to apply for study leave. In addition, the Birmingham Teaching Fellows scheme was introduced in 2013/14 and this recognises leaders in teaching and supports them to deliver a wide range of educational activities and initiatives across the University. One example is the development of a plagiarism and referencing online test by a Fellow in Arts and Law. This development was commended as best practice in the Guild's Student Voice Report (2016).

Through our university-wide Educational Enhancement Fund (EEF) we invest in staff and student-led projects to develop innovative educational enhancements that can be scaled across the institution. The Birmingham Assessment for Learning Initiative (BALI) originated as a project funded through the EEF (see section (d) below). A further example is the Academic Writing Advisory Service (AWAS), pioneered by Arts and Law and complemented by the Library's Academic Skills Service, which provides a host of online, self-access materials for students wishing to improve their writing and achieve the highest possible degree outcomes. Additional services offered through AWAS include video tutorials, discipline/programme/module-specific writing workshops and 1-2-1 support. Usage statistics show that students engage actively with this service: student uptake has more than doubled between 2013/14 and 2015/16 from 1673 to 3478 students. Qualitative feedback underlines the value of AWAS: 'Brilliant! So thought-provoking'; 'A really helpful



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Our strategy is to design courses and assessment that support students to become independent, self-motivated and reflective learners and develop the skills, knowledge and confidence to achieve outstanding employment outcomes.

session – I wasn't made to feel daunted and did not feel judged... x has helped me with constructive feedback which I can use for my next essay'.

We celebrate the quality and innovation of our teaching through the University Teaching Awards. In 2014/15, we introduced a series of student-led 'Outstanding Teaching Awards' pioneered by our Vice-Chancellor and jointly organised between the Guild of Students and the University. Students and the Guild are involved in the recognition and celebration of teaching excellence and they nominate staff in all categories. From 2015/16, winners of the Outstanding Teaching Awards have been involved in the delivery of the PCAP (see page 9) to ensure best practice is fed back in a systematic way. In addition to this, staff are able to nominate peers for the annual Teaching Academy awards which are presented in recognition of excellence across a range of categories including educational innovation, research-informed teaching, leadership in teaching, and support of student learning. The Teaching Academy also makes awards to postgraduate researchers for outstanding contributions to teaching and student learning.

The quality of our teaching and our approach to supporting and recognising teaching excellence are major contributors to outstanding student satisfaction with 'Teaching on my Course' rated at over 90%. Our commitment to excellent teaching was also recognised in our 2016 QAA HER report which identified as good practice the 'high value placed on teaching and the way in which staff are enabled to develop and improve as teachers'.

## Feedback

Over the TEF assessment period, we have focussed extensively on improving our student satisfaction scores in Assessment and Feedback. Our strategy is three-fold: to undertake University-wide actions, to empower Schools and Departments to take local actions based on best practice appropriate to their disciplines, and to fund and pilot new initiatives that can be developed and rolled out across the institution.

An example of the first element of the strategy is the action we took in 2014/15 to introduce a university-wide policy establishing a 15-day turnaround for feedback on assessment. This policy was introduced in response to student requests and also staff concerns that feedback was not able to inform future assessments. The outcome was a five percentage point increase in the 2015/16 NSS results for timeliness of feedback (71%). The University of Birmingham Assessment for Learning Initiative (BALI) was initiated to improve the coherence of assessment across each year of our programmes and to ensure that feedback on assessments can 'feed-forward' to subsequent related assessments. Examples of good practice from this project have been shared with other universities through the LEAF initiative (Leading Enhancement through Assessment and Feedback) which is a collaboration between the British U21 Universities. The impact of this work was endorsed in our 2016



QAA HER Report which stated: '[the University] operates equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment'. In addition, 'our systematic implementation of BALL internally' to improve students' learning was recognised as good practice.

The second part of the strategy can be illustrated through the College of Life and Environmental Sciences where the School of Sport, Exercise and Rehabilitation Sciences introduced a standardised approach to providing feedback across its multidisciplinary provision through online templates. This approach to improving consistency resulted in an improvement of eight percentage points (to 77%) in NSS 2015/16. In the College of Social Sciences, the School of Education consulted with students, staff and External Examiners in 2014/15 as part of a comprehensive review of its assessment procedures. The outcome was new strategy centred on assessment for learning rather than assessment of learning, with a stronger focus on 'feed forward'. This has contributed to improvements in the School's NSS Assessment and Feedback scores from 54% (13/14) to 83% (15/16).

The third element of our strategy is exemplified by the Bank of Assessed Work which was developed and piloted by Arts and Law to help students better understand marking criteria. The Bank includes examples of undergraduate work across all levels of attainment and has grown considerably from its pilot beginning. In Arts and Law alone, the Bank currently contains over 580 pieces of work. The Bank initiative has had a clear impact on student engagement which, in turn, has had a positive impact on student learning. Data show that students access the bank on a regular basis throughout the year and we have seen a positive increase in NSS ratings for assessment and feedback. For example, in the School of English Literature in which the pilot was initiated, NSS 'Assessment and Feedback' increased from 70% (2012/13) to 84% (2015/16). The principles underpinning the Bank have now been rolled out to all five Colleges and we continue to monitor its impact.

A further example of our localised strategy is an initiative that originated in the College of Life and Environmental Sciences. The development of in-class peer marking exercises was first trialled in the College of Life and Environmental Sciences where students in workshops marked anonymised exam transcripts according to the marking criteria. These exercises help students to understand the criteria against which they are being assessed, increase the depth of student engagement with feedback, and provide students with an opportunity to enter into a dialogue with academic staff about assessment criteria. Outcomes from these workshops are fed back to teaching staff to inform future teaching delivery. This approach is acknowledged as good practice and has been recommended to all Schools across the University.

The TEF metrics have been useful in helping us to review our feedback strategy; particularly how we might target initiatives at those students who have indicated they are dissatisfied and for whom we receive a negative satisfaction flag (female, disabled and disadvantaged).

As already noted, we have initiated a joint project with our Guild of Students to address gender differences. For students from disadvantaged backgrounds we are exploring how our hugely successful A2B provision could be extended to include support for engaging with Assessment and Feedback and to enhance our dialogue with that group.

For our disabled students, we provide a suite of personalised support. This ranges from a named Key Worker allocated at the start of their studies to individual Action Plans on teaching and learning adjustments, as well as specialist 1-2-1 tutors and mentors to meet students' individual needs and assist students in engaging constructively with academic feedback. Our termly forum disseminates good practice amongst School-based staff charged with supporting disabled students. Our central disability team support this network and provide consultation and training. Embedded staff work alongside academic staff to enhance the quality of disabled students' experience, including feedback. To further enhance this provision, we have begun a process of recruiting professionally trained and locally deployed Reasonable Adjustment Co-ordinators. Students are also able to access an enhanced level of support from our Academic Skills Centre who will assist students to embed appropriate strategies as a result of their feedback and specialist input. This also mainstreams significant elements of the provision in line with our aspirations to develop a more inclusive learning environment. Another development is within the School of Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences where we use a 'sticker system' to identify the work of students with specific learning difficulties. This information ensures academic colleagues can provide feedback in the most appropriate and accessible ways to meet the needs of students with particular disabilities. The approach has now been adopted in both Psychology and Chemistry and we will review the impact on student satisfaction and consider rolling it out University-wide.

Institutionally, we have seen our NSS scores for Assessment and Feedback increase from 68% (2012/13) to 70% in 2015/16. Where we have identified localised approaches that have delivered impressive improvements we are rolling these out to all Schools. We have evidence that our initiatives have had a positive impact on our students' attainment and outcomes, but we remain committed to seeing further improvements in students' satisfaction in core and all split metrics and receiving these new data has informed our plans.



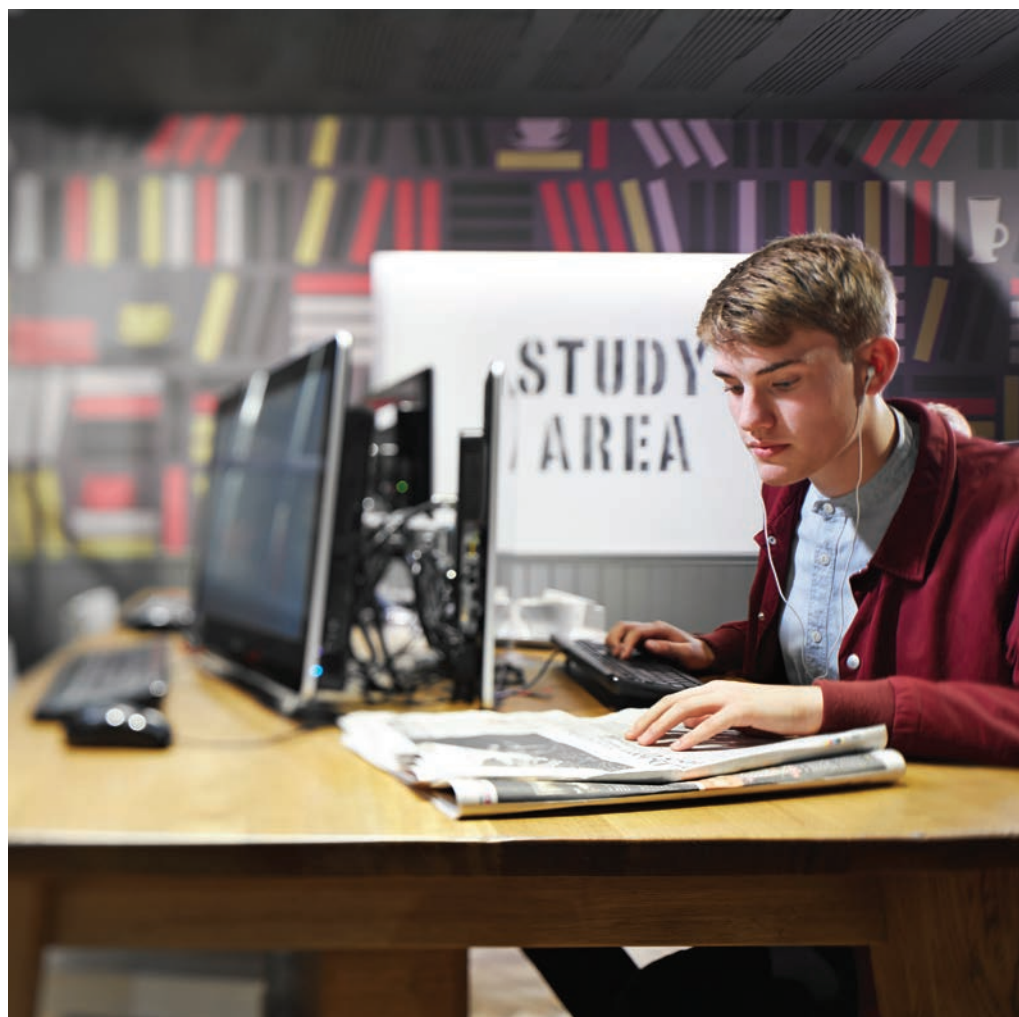




'The Panel commends as good practice the "high value placed on teaching and the way staff are enabled to develop and improve."' — 2016 QAA Report



*The Guardian* (2017) confirmed the University's position at tenth in the UK for value-added.



## SECTION THREE:

# LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

### Resources

The University of Birmingham campus plays a central role in the quality of students' overall educational experience. The campus provides the context for the development of a community of learners. Outstanding integrated spaces bring together students from all disciplines to live and learn alongside one another. Our strategy is to consult on, invest in and deliver a rolling programme of campus enhancements (both physical and digital), and outstanding learning support facilities and services to meet contemporary needs.

Over the assessment period we invested in excess of £200million in new developments to enhance the student experience including a new University Library (opened in September 2016), a Student Hub to bring together a range of student services co-located in the heart of campus, a Collaborative Teaching Laboratory to facilitate new, interdisciplinary education across the STEM disciplines, new halls of residence, and the Bramall Music Building and Concert Hall. In addition a new, state-of-the-art £60million Sports Centre with Olympic-sized pool opened in early 2017.

Alongside these major developments, the University continues to invest in enhancements to the range and quality of resources available to support student learning. For example, students have access to subject-specific academic resource collections in the main University library, the Cadbury Research Library, the Barber Institute of Fine Arts and the Lapworth Museum of Geology (the Lapworth and Barber collections generated 988 HE learning visits during 2014/15 alone). Research-grade facilities are used in teaching in all Colleges, such as the College of Medical and Dental Science's prosectorium and the College of Engineering and Physical Science's Cyclotron, which is the UK's only research-dedicated particle accelerator. The Cyclotron is available to third and fourth-year Physics students in their final-year project. The investment in our new Main Library with its state-of-the-art study spaces has seen a 40% increase in student usage over the first term and students are engaged continuously in operational enhancements. The Library collection now exceeds 2 million printed books, 0.5 million ebooks, and 51,000 serial subscriptions.

On-campus facilities are complemented by student access to learning opportunities available in the outstanding facilities of our professional and regional partners. Examples include students in the College of Medical and Dental Sciences who have access to the NHS Queen Elizabeth Hospital Birmingham, which is one of the UK's largest single-site NHS hospitals and hosts Europe's largest critical care unit; and the new NHS Birmingham Dental Hospital, the first integrated, stand-alone Dental Hospital and School to be built in the UK for almost 40 years. For students in the College of Arts and Law, the RSC's Other Place extends learning opportunities with RSC actors and directors involved in student programmes. Visits to plays at the RSC are integrated into our English

Literature modules, and this includes pre-performance seminars hosted by the Shakespeare Institute as well as the annual Stratford Residential which is a compulsory element of our BA English programme.

Investment in digital resources is aligned with our strategy to ensure student learning is supported and enhanced by contemporary resources. Student and staff feedback led to the replacement of our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) during the TEF assessment period. We took the decision to become the first in the UK to invest in the Canvas Virtual Learning Environment because we recognised that it had the capacity to deliver major change and offer an element of future proofing. We have introduced (2015/16) digital reading lists and digitised content (ResourceLists@bham and FindIt@bham), which have been extremely successful in improving access to our extensive print and online collections through a single search interface integrated with Canvas. These systems have contributed to an increase in downloads of online articles by 13% between 2014 and 2016, and downloads of ebooks by 18% in the same period. In particular, these services respond to feedback from student focus groups about the accessibility of course materials for disabled students. Feedback from students and staff suggests our investment in Canvas has been successful; data from the 2015 Birmingham Student Survey 2014 indicate that 82% of students agreed or strongly agreed that Canvas was useful in supporting their studies.

We have also introduced a 'lecture capture' facility (Panopto) that is available for use in over 230 teaching venues across campus. This facility supports student learning depending on individual needs; for example, revisiting learning which can be particularly beneficial for those students who struggle to take notes in a lecture; supporting those students who wish to take additional time to consider the learning points made; and as a revision tool. Representative student feedback includes: 'Very useful – especially for non-English students'; 'Sometimes there's not enough time to scribble everything down in the lecture so it's nice to go back and finish off'.

### Scholarship, research and professional practice linked to attainment and employability

The University of Birmingham is a research-intensive university and our education is designed to ensure that students are engaged in learning that is at the cutting-edge of knowledge. Our strategy is to produce graduates who are independent in their learning, analytical and critical in their thinking, and both evidence-based and ethics-aware in their actions. Taken together, these characteristics contribute to the outstanding attainment, employment and further study outcomes of our students. Our approach to research-led education can be defined by its three constituent dimensions: research-informed teaching, research-based learning and researcher-education.



Research-informed teaching ensures that student learning is grounded in the most up-to-date discipline-based and pedagogical research. Research-informed teaching is at the core of our curricular and extra-curricular provision. The University's vibrant series of research seminars is open to undergraduate students who are encouraged to attend and, in so doing, enrich their studies. A notable example is a recent lecture led by Professor Sir J. Fraser Stoddart (former Head of our School of Chemistry) who lectured on his Nobel Prize-winning research that was based on work undertaken at the University. The University also specifically recognises outstanding examples of research-informed teaching as part of the annual Teaching Academy Awards for Educational Enhancement and Innovation (see Section 2c).

Research-based learning refers to the opportunities for students to learn life-long transferable researcher and wider investigatory skills to enable them to engage in critique, discussion and action at stretching levels. In research-based learning, students are able to develop outstanding cognitive skills which form a key element of higher education learning gain. For example, the College of Medical and Dental Sciences offers a Research Taster programme for first-year undergraduate students to engage them directly in research at the highest levels and to support them to critique papers written by their research-active teaching staff. This programme is part of a wider 'Inspiring Students' initiative part-funded by the Academy of Medical Sciences. The Birmingham Project offers a further example of research-based learning that is linked to employability. First-year students from across campus have the opportunity to work together in multidisciplinary teams to tackle a 'real world' challenge from an investigative, research perspective. As a result, students develop new capabilities in areas such as project management, team building, problem-solving and presentation skills. In this project, student teams work closely with members of our academic staff and in conjunction with leading employers from the worlds of business, industry and the arts. Regular project participants include Jaguar Land Rover, PwC, KPMG, IBM and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (CBSO). Project teams collaborated to produce outputs ranging from mobile apps to campaigns and product designs. Feedback from the participant employers and students has been universally positive. The Vice-Chancellor's Seminar Series offers another insight into our stretching, research-based education. The seminars provide an opportunity for undergraduates to lead and engage in rigorous, evidence-based academic debate. The themes are selected by the Vice-Chancellor and students consider topical issues ranging from high culture and elitism to scientific discovery and medical and moral ethics.

Researcher-education describes the opportunities for all students to become researchers who contribute to the development and synthesis of knowledge in their field and, in the process, challenge themselves. Our curriculum builds the requisite skills throughout all undergraduate programmes so that in their final year, students are ready to undertake an independent investigation. In the College of Life and Environmental

Sciences, Psychology students are engaged in research as participant learners from the first semester of their programme. In the Colleges of Arts and Law, Engineering and Physical Sciences, and Social Sciences, undergraduate Research Assistant/Research Student Scholarship schemes are available, providing students with opportunities to work as paid research assistants for five weeks over the summer period. Undergraduate research projects demonstrate outstanding levels of achievement, with numerous examples of the best work being published in top-rated academic journals.

Examples of our research-led approach to education are woven throughout all aspects of our curriculum. In order to be successful in research-led education, our programmes are designed to ensure students demonstrate academic aptitude and also skills that are highly valued by employers, contributing to our outstanding attainment and highly skilled employment outcomes. In terms of attainment, 85.3% of our students achieved a 1st class or 2.1 honours degree in 2015/16; an achievement that is underpinned by our robust quality assurance procedures (2016 QAA HER). This outcome contributes to our success in preparing students for postgraduate study with 27.6% of graduates taking this option over the assessment period (12/13 -14/15 DLHE data).

## Personalised learning

Our strategic framework outlined that 'we support each student to develop a personal journey through their education at Birmingham'. Students in our diverse population have a wide range of needs, interests and ambitions. Our aim is to ensure that all students can achieve their potential. We structure our learning environment to enable students to tailor their education to meet their individual needs and support their personal ambitions. Our strategy to support personalised learning ranges from academic and pastoral support through to intra- and extra-curricular opportunities, all designed to ensure our students make a successful transition to, and succeed in, higher education (see also Section 4).

We provide an integrated network of complementary academic services to ensure students can access personalised support. A good example is the University's institution-wide Academic Skills Centre (ASC) which provides tailored learning support and enhancement activities for all students. The ASC comprises a Study Skills Centre and a Mathematics Support Centre. The ASC supplements discipline-specific provision available in the Colleges with an extensive programme of generic and discipline-specific learning support. The Centre also offers targeted support for at-risk cohorts; for example bespoke sessions for mature students. In order to expand its reach and accessibility, the Centre offers support outside of 'normal' working hours and has invested in developing new online modes of support to enhance student retention and outcomes. Usage data show there were 9,807 student interactions with the ASC in 2015/16 which represents 150% increase from 2013/14.

Furthermore, our data indicate that the ASC's services are utilized comparatively more by mature, BME, disabled, low SEC and A2B students, suggesting that the ASC strategy has been successful.

We have embraced research findings on the benefits of peer support and seen evidence in practice. Our highly successful Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) Scheme operates in all five Colleges. PASS is a discipline-owned and student-led scheme which aims to enhance the first-year student experience through collaborative, exploratory discussion. Sessions are facilitated by students from later years of study, which, simultaneously, supports them to enhance their own learning outcomes. Our PASS Leaders from 2014/15 achieved 91.6% graduate employability in the latest DLHE stats, compared to the University average of 85.3%.

During the TEF assessment period we introduced College- and School-based Student Engagement Officers (SEOs). Working in close collaboration with academic staff, the role of the SEO is to increase engagement and enhance the undergraduate student experience in ways that meet specific localised needs in different Schools. The SEOs have become a visible and accessible presence for students. Many SEOs are recent graduates who understand the challenges of student life and so can be viewed by our students as knowledgeable peers. SEOs work on a variety of projects such as running cultural, intellectual and social activities; keeping undergraduate students up to date with what's happening in schools via social media platforms; working closely with academic colleagues to support undergraduate student induction and transition to life at Birmingham; meeting with students and staff about gathering and disseminating feedback; feeding back to students about how their comments have been acted upon; and developing innovative, local projects that enrich the student experience. Students, staff and SEOs have all reported positively on the impact of this initiative on student engagement.

New initiatives are developed in response to our continuous analysis of student needs and outcomes. For example, as part of the 2013/14 annual review we identified a need for enhanced support for BTEC students in transitioning to higher education study. Swift action was taken to address the issues resulting in non-continuation rates falling in one academic year (2014/15) from 5.9% to 4.9%. Latest data (15/16) show a further improvement with non-continuation falling to 4.3%. Our actions also resulted in improved retention rates for all cohorts of students targeted by the interventions, with non-continuation rates improving from 2013/14 to 2014/15 for BTEC (6% point improvement), BME (1.4% points) and Low-SEC (2% points) students.

We offer a range of tailored services for our international students to support their transition to study in a new country and ensure they achieve the very best outcomes. We offer an intensive induction, coordinated by our International Students Advisory Service (ISAS), which includes workshops on studying and living in a new country. In 2015/16 we rolled

'We support each student to develop a personal journey through their education at Birmingham.'

Over the assessment period we invested in excess of £200million in new developments to enhance the student experience including a new University Library (opened in September 2016).





out our 'full-year induction' programme, available throughout the year, so students can refresh their knowledge at a time which suits them. Workshops to support academic progression and employment are also offered throughout the year. ISAS colleagues work closely with Welfare Tutors and Student Engagement Officers to ensure issues are identified and early interventions can be made to support successful completion. The impact of our international student support and the accessibility of our education is evident in our student outcomes: overseas (non-EU) students secured outstanding graduate employability across the TEF period (96.2% (12/13), 100% (13/14) and 99.5% (14/15) – DHLE).

Earlier we outlined our approach to offering flexibility and choice in the curriculum. We also ensure students can personalise their experience through work-based learning; for example, in the College of Social Sciences a Professional Development Module was launched in 2013 to build employability skills into our educational provision. The aim of this initiative was to ensure that all Social Science students are able to take an accredited work-based module. Students are encouraged to construct their own placements. For those students who find it challenging to gain access a placement on their own, for example those from a widening participation background who may not have the requisite social networks,

there is pro-active support from the Placements Team. This approach has undoubtedly contributed to our success in securing a positive flag for the highly skilled metric in our TEF splits for disadvantaged students. In 2014, our Placement Module won Most Improved Commitment to Employability at the National Undergraduate Employability Awards.

Our employability award – the University-accredited Personal Skills Award (PSA) – further supports students to construct an education experience tailored to their individual needs. The PSA is designed to help all students develop, recognise and articulate their skills effectively in preparation for their chosen graduate job market. The PSA offers three different pathway choices: the Points pathway (which recognises over 240 extra-curricular activities), the Modular pathway (taught modules), and the Foundation pathway (a range of innovative, short online skills courses). The PSA benefits from the engagement of a range of employer partners in programme design and delivery including Capgemini, Enterprise Rent-a-Car, Jaguar Land Rover, PwC, Sanctuary Housing and Teach First. Students benefit from activities such as bespoke skills sessions and advanced interview assessments. The PSA is recognised by the Association of Graduate Recruiters (AGR).

Students are provided with an Enhanced Transcript (our version of the Higher Education Achievement Record) to enable them to record and evidence their individual engagement in the many enhancement and development opportunities available to them. Over 770 different student engagement activities are represented on the transcript. In addition, in recognition of the vast range of opportunities available, a personal development planning tool – 'PROGRESS' – has been designed to help students manage their study and skills development. For example, beyond the academic curriculum, the diverse needs and interests of our students can be met through the provision of extra-curricular opportunities in the widest possible range of activities. The Guild runs over 250 student societies ranging from sport to music, drama, politics, media, religion and a wide range of volunteering opportunities. We are proud of the different levels at which students can engage in these activities ranging from recreational participation to the highest levels of success including the achievement of Olympic gold medals. In music, we offer nine University choirs and five orchestras ensuring opportunities for all levels of ability. The Guild provides training so students can make the most of the extra-curricular experiences available. Our transcript will be further enhanced by the inclusion of GPA for which we contributed to the leadership of the national pilot and are a participant in the sector steering group.

The impact of our academic and pastoral support network is evident in our performance against benchmark for 'Academic Support' where we are above benchmark in all years and across all splits. Our 2016 QAA HER recognised the range, value and impact of the activities we offer noting 'an exceptionally wide range of activities which are well designed, coherent and coordinated, and which are significantly beneficial to students, graduates, [and] employers'.



## SECTION FOUR:

## STUDENT OUTCOMES AND LEARNING GAIN

Our strong student outcomes are underpinned by non-continuation rates where we exceed our challenging benchmark for each year of the TEF metrics. Our outstanding physical and digital resources ensure that students are supported to achieve their potential. We recognise that we are below our non-continuation benchmark for mature, BME and disadvantaged students and we have developed specific strategies to understand this issue at a granular level. For example, in 2015/16 we commissioned a Working Group to interrogate our retention data to understand the interplay of different student characteristics against retention figures. A new initiative has supported the retention of BTEC students (further detail above) and we recently co-led a Catalyst fund bid to HEFCE to develop a new national programme to meet the multiple challenges that are faced by some of these students.

## (a) Careers and graduate employability

There are close links between the Sections 3 and 4 of this submission. In 2012, we invested over £4million in an Employability Strategy to provide our students with access to sector-leading employability provision and to support all students to achieve outstanding employability outcomes. Central to our strategy was the creation of the Careers Network which now numbers 66 staff. The Network provides a University-wide service that includes dedicated College Employability Teams who offer a bespoke service for each of the five academic Colleges. These teams work alongside academic colleagues to ensure employability is embedded in subject-curriculum design and employers can co-deliver teaching. There is an array of such opportunities across the institution.

In an extension of the original strategy, we have created the Student Engagement Team (SET), which was designed to ensure students were actively involved in the design and delivery of the employability strategy. The team now numbers over 35 students and they co-create and deliver many aspects of our institutional employability including the use of social media to market activity and helping to ensure students engage with the many opportunities available to them. This initiative was recognised by a National Centre for Work Experience Award for its 'innovative approach to student engagement with their own employability provision'.

We have ensured that our students have access to one of the most diverse extra-curricular internship and work experience programmes in any UK university. Our Global Challenge programme provides fully funded and bespoke internship opportunities around the world and includes, for example, annual internships with the British Consulates in Chicago, Melbourne and San Paulo, with GSK in Morocco and Argentina, and with the Guangzhou Municipal Government. We also provide a range of bespoke internships created from our strong alumni and employer partnerships. These include opportunities with Sony, Birmingham City Council, the Birmingham Children's Hospital, Bridgestone UK, Horseman Capital, Grant Thornton, and the UK Sepsis Trust, amongst many others. We have expanded our portfolio of

international opportunities across the USA, Asia, Europe and Africa through collaborations with International Citizenships Service, Change 100, Absolute Internships and Eures UK amongst others. We have significantly increased the number of bespoke internships available from 126 in 2013/14 to 409 in 2015/16.

Internship programmes are underpinned by a suite of financial bursaries, such as the Gateway Bursaries. These bursaries offer up to £2,000 to fund extra-curricular placements for priority WP student groups ensuring that opportunities are accessible to all students. Those students in receipt of a Careers Network bursary from 2014/15 cohort achieved 92.7% graduate employability (compared with the University average of 85.3%). 100% of respondents rated their knowledge, competence and confidence in their own working abilities after completing the work experience either 'good' or 'excellent', compared with just 48% before undertaking the activity.

## (b) Vocational programmes

Vocational programmes form a major part of our offering and contribute to our employability outcomes. We are proud of the number, range and quality of our vocational undergraduate programmes that are closely informed by the highest levels of professional-practice. Vocational programmes are found in all five of our Colleges and include Medicine, Pharmacy, Accountancy, Social Work, Education, Engineering, Law, Dentistry, Nursing, and Physiotherapy. Our intake to these programmes has increased by over 9% over the assessment period and we have evidence that these programmes are of outstanding quality. For example, we have been selected as the only HEI partner in a new DfE 'Teaching Partnership' for Social Work, a consortium of nine Local Authorities across the West Midlands. Our Initial Teacher Education is rated as 'outstanding' by Ofsted. Our vocational programmes are particularly attractive to local learners and those returning to study. Employment outcomes for students from the West Midlands consistently outperform the sector average for this region; for example, in the 2014/15 DLHE, the regional sector average was 71.5% and our regional students achieved 82.3% graduate employability.

## (c) Enterprise and employers

We have a long-standing strategy to engage in effective partnerships with employers to inform curriculum design and delivery. Employers provide direct advice to the University through their participation in Steering Groups and Advisory Boards (such as our Employer Partner Board, hosted by the Careers Network). Representatives include major graduate recruiters, regional SMEs, and public sector and not-for-profit organisations. Our Careers Network also partners with academics to deliver 'enterprise modules' which embed enterprise and entrepreneurship content within the curriculum. Examples include:



'Pharmaceutical Enterprise', 'From the Lab to the Market Place, and 'Commercialising Science' in the College of Medical and Dental Sciences; 'Enterprise and Exercise Promotion' in the College of Life and Environmental Sciences; and our partnership with Reckitt Benckiser in the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences. In these modules, students solve real, commercially relevant problems and build skills valued by employers including teamwork, communication, planning and time management.

### (d) Mentoring

A further element of our Employability Strategy is the provision of mentoring programmes. Students are able to seek personalised advice and guidance from professionals working in a sector relevant to their future employment aspirations. Our Alumni Leadership Mentoring Programme (ALMP) offers individual mentoring to final-year students by some of the University's most senior and successful alumni. Current examples include Cilla Snowball CBE, Group Chairman and Group CEO of AMV BBDO; Baroness Doreen Massey, Chair of The National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse; and Alan Davey, Controller at Radio 3. This scheme supports students who may not have the cultural capital to access business leaders through their personal networks.

The ALMP is part of our strategy to ensure that every student can benefit from all that a University of Birmingham education has to offer. We recognise that some students require very specific forms of mentoring support in order to be successful. Our sector-leading LGBT Mentoring scheme matches students with relevant alumni across a range of occupations to gain advice on how to be happy and successful as an 'out' LGBT employee. Students from the 2014/15 cohort reported a 160% increase in confidence and knowledge about their chosen sector following their mentoring relationship. Similarly, our BME mentoring scheme has given students opportunities to network and express their identities when making the transition from higher education to the workplace. Our Graduate Mentoring Scheme is open to final-year undergraduates and supports them in the six months post-graduation to ease transition into employment. Undergraduates accessing one

Those students in receipt of a Careers Network bursary from 2014/15 cohort achieved 92.7% graduate employability (compared with the University average of 85.3%).

Students from the 2014/15 cohort reported a 160% increase in confidence and knowledge about their chosen sector following their mentoring relationship.



of our mentoring schemes increased from 209 in 2013/14 to 331 in 2015/16, with student mentees from the 2012/13 and 2013/14 cohorts achieving 99.2% in work or further study with 91.3% in graduate-level work or study (against a University figure of 94.4% and 84.3% respectively). 2014/15 cohort students achieved 88.8% graduate employability against the University average of 85.3%.

The impact of our strategies is evident in our student outcomes. Our employability rate is consistently above 94% across each year of the TEF metrics, and we currently rank fourth highest (excluding specialist institutions) for graduate employability in the UK (*The Times Good University Guide 2016* and CUG 2017). Our 2016 QAA HER report also noted as an exemplar of good practice: the 'University's sustained engagement with employers, which enhances learning and employment opportunities for students'. Highly skilled employability has increased from 80.8% in 2011/12 to 85.3% for the cohort leaving in 2014/15 (latest data). Our TEF metrics show we are above benchmark across all years and all splits. Further evidence of the impact of this investment is in our rapid rise up the national league tables for graduate prospects and a number of national employability awards during the assessment period; for example, Midlands Enterprise University of the Year (2015), Best Careers Support for International Students (2014), Most Improved Commitment to Employability (2014), Best University Placement Service Award (2013), and being named as *The Times and The Sunday Times* University of the Year for Graduate Employment 2015/16.

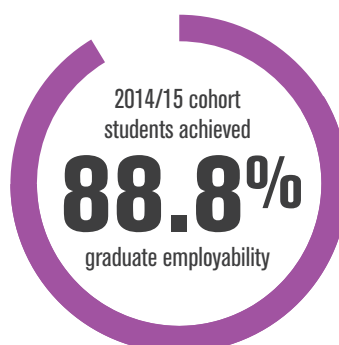
## (e) Securing success for all students and learning gain

Our overriding strategic aim is to ensure that all students can reach their potential to secure outstanding outcomes. During the assessment period, we have taken actions at every level of the organisation to support students to realise their ambitions.

Our Inclusive Curriculum Working Group resulted in recommendations to enhance staff understanding of student diversity and to ensure programmes, resources and teaching styles are inclusive. We have developed dedicated website resources and a series of staff development workshops. We introduced a BME ambassador scheme that was partly funded by the HEA to improve BME student inclusion, representation, engagement and to promote race equality. This project has been widely cited across the UK HE sector as an example of good practice in engaging and listening to BME students. We have worked with our Guild of Students to develop online resources that support the needs of mature students. We have also developed an online equality training module for students and undertaken significant work in Estates to improve accessibility across campus. We have developed trans-inclusive practices including in the provision of gender neutral facilities and the recording of personal information and through the publication of

transgender guidance. We have worked with student disability and wellbeing services to create a 'good mental health' strategy. For carers, we have developed targeted support including a student carers' group, a student support agreement for carers and identifying student carers at Registration. Working closely with the Guild's liberation associations and Guild officers via the Equality Executive Group, we have ensured student input on equality issues and embedded the principles of Athena SWAN. We outperform the sector for female representation in Maths and Engineering (37.2% and 20.6% respectively against sector figures of 34.1% and 16.4%). In 2015, we took the next step in developing our equality principles and practices by embarking upon the work required to achieve the ECU's Race Equality Charter.

For students who come from families with little or no prior experience of higher education, we have developed our pioneering A2B scheme. This delivers pre-entry learning support for students in the West Midlands and is aimed specifically at applicants who have experienced some form of disadvantage but who have the intellectual potential to succeed. Following the pre-entry programme, A2B students join the University and are distributed widely across disciplines. This distribution provides a tracker for learning gain across all our Colleges and we can report that students recruited via this programme are amongst our strongest performers. Our A2B students have, on average, an 8% lower entry tariff than the University mean; ie, the A2B tariff in 2013/14 was 396, in 2014/15 it was 399 and in 15/16 it was 406; whereas the average University tariff over this period was 433. Retention rates for A2B students are consistently above the University average (+2.5%pt in 2013/14, +2.7 in 2014/15 and +0.5 in 2015/16). Moreover, graduate employability in 2014/15 (year 3 in the TEF metrics) was 87%, against the University average of 85.3%. The scheme has also contributed to facilitating access to the professions; for example our Medical School is on-track to achieve its widening participation targets ahead of the 2020 target, and the report from the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility review into increasing access to the leading professions (published Jan 2017) highlighted the Birmingham Access to Medicine as an exemplar programme. The TEF metrics further underline this impact: mature, disabled, disadvantaged and BME student cohorts exceed all benchmarks for Teaching on my course, Academic Support and Highly Skilled Employment.





## SECTION FIVE:

## CONCLUSION

Our strategies have delivered consistently outstanding outcomes for our students from all backgrounds, particularly in retention and progression to highly skilled employment and further study. Our research- and practice-informed approach to education ensures that students are working at the forefront of knowledge. Our course-design and assessment strategies provide stretch, appropriate levels of contact and personalised provision. We secure the engagement of our students and ensure resources enhance their learning. Our approach to and support for teaching excellence underpins outstanding student outcomes.



Appendix:

## TEF METRICS

	Indicator (a) %	Benchmark (b) %	Difference (a)-(b) *	Z-score	Flag	Years		
						1	2	3
Full-time headcount: 18,225								
The teaching on my course	90.3	88.0	2.4	7.8	+	+	+	+
Assessment and feedback	69.9	71.0	-1.2	-2.8				
Academic support	82.8	81.8	1.1	2.9				
Non-continuation	3.5	3.7	0.3	1.4				
Employment or further study	94.4	94.1	0.3	1.5				
Highly skilled employment or further study	84.3	77.6	6.7	16.6	++	++	++	++
Part-time headcount: 1,129								
The teaching on my course	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
Assessment and feedback	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
Academic support	R	R	R	R	R	R	R	R
Non-continuation	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Employment or further study	99.6	97.1	2.6	3.1	++	+		
Highly skilled employment or further study	98.2	80.2	18.0	9.2	++	++	++	++





Our 2016 QAA HER report noted nine areas of good practice and two commendations; external examiners regularly endorse our academic standards; and approximately 40 Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) accredit our programmes.





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Designed and printed by

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