

Lancaster University: TEF Year Two Provider Submission

1. Provider Context

1.1 Lancaster University: Vision and Position

Lancaster University, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2014, set out a vision in 2013 for its future in its Strategic Plan for 2020:

“We will become a university that is globally significant – a leader in higher education that provides the highest quality research and teaching, and engages locally and internationally on the issues and debates of the day and future. Driven by research, and stimulating learning, the globally significant university informs and changes practice and thinking worldwide.”

The Strategic Plan is operationalised by specific sub-strategies focused on our educational practice, our research excellence, our people, our international objectives, the continuing enhancement of our estate and our drive to embed digital practices throughout our teaching, research, engagement and ways of working. Taken together, these strategies help to ensure that the ‘Lancaster student experience’ is epitomised by excellent, research-stimulated teaching combined with wider opportunities for personal learning, within a friendly and collegiate environment. Our values and behaviours enshrine this approach to education built on excellence, innovation and partnership.

The University occupies a purpose-built green-field campus on the southern edge of Lancaster. The campus provides an attractive environment, incorporating award-winning residential accommodation, facilities for research, for learning and teaching, for student activities and support and for administrative and professional services. In addition, the University has ongoing partnerships for the delivery of programmes leading to the award of Lancaster University degrees in Malaysia, India, China and Ghana, and in three FE Colleges in Northwest England. The University also has a significant number of access, articulation, study abroad and exchange arrangements, and research collaborations with colleges and HE providers across the world. This makes the composition of Lancaster’s student population one of the most international in the sector, both in terms of the population studying at Lancaster (35% from outside the UK) and the level of transnational education (top decile of UK HEIs).

1.2 Recognised Excellence

The University is proud of its excellent and sustained league table performance across its portfolio, achieved alongside a strong track record in widening participation¹ reflecting our commitment to equality of opportunity and excellence in education for all.

All three UK university league tables currently rank Lancaster as the best university in the North West of England. The University is a member of the N8 group of research-intensive universities and in REF 2014, 83% of Lancaster’s research was considered internationally excellent and 35% world leading; ranking Lancaster 13th for the percentage of world leading research, 18th in the UK overall, and 20th for impact. This strength and depth in research excellence enables Lancaster’s focus on research-stimulated teaching. This focus was recognised in the 2015 QAA Higher Education Review (HER):

“The review team found that the Strategic Plan commitment reflects what is happening in terms of evidence of research-stimulated teaching, as well as innovative thinking and staff approaches to teaching and learning.”

¹ 25% of UK students from Socio-Economic Class (SEC) Group 4-7 and 91% from state schools in 2016-17

Name of Provider: Lancaster University
UKPRN: 10007768

The provision of excellent services for students and staff, combined with a drive for continuous improvement, underpin Lancaster's ability to excel in relation to our teaching and research objectives. This commitment was recognised in 2015 when Lancaster was awarded Customer Service Excellence accreditation for all professional and administrative services across the University, the first UK university to achieve this.

1.3 The Portfolio

The University provides undergraduate and postgraduate education through four Faculties: Arts and Social Sciences, Science and Technology, Health and Medicine and the Management School. These Faculties incorporate 28 academic Departments including a medical school. At undergraduate level, the University awards over 670 different subject titles across 63 JACS codes, 92 of which are PSRB accredited. Almost 30% of Lancaster's students are postgraduate, of the >9,700 undergraduate students, 99% are full-time. In addition there are 5,300 students studying for Lancaster University degrees registered with our international teaching partners and >4,200 students registered with FE College partners (for validated provision).

1.4 Organisational Structure and Governance

The University has a bicameral system of governance, with the Council being the governing body. The Senate acts on behalf of Council, to which it reports. The Council is responsible for the finance, property investments and general business of the University, and for setting the general strategic direction of the institution. It is chaired by the Pro-Chancellor and includes lay members, senior University officers and representatives from the Senate and the Students' Union. Our approach to governance, including a range of joint Council-Senate committees, demonstrates the priority that both bodies give to teaching and student experience.

The Senate is responsible for the strategic development of the academic activities of the University, and the approval of policies to promote and ensure the academic quality of teaching and research. Chaired by the Vice-Chancellor (VC), membership includes academic and academic-related staff and student representatives. To drive its education priorities, Senate sub-committees include the Education Committee and the Collaborative Provision Oversight Committee. An Academic Standards and Quality Committee oversees the assurance of quality and standards, reporting to the Education Committee. These committees are linked to Faculty and departmental committees, providing a robust committee system to facilitate regular, open and effective dialogue between those involved in education and student experience across all levels.

The senior executive team is led by the VC. The current VC took up post in January 2012 and led development of the Strategic Plan for 2020 alongside a refresh of the senior management structure, including new roles to lead education. Taken together, these changes reinforced Lancaster's strategic ambition to offer world-class educational opportunities to all, within a learning environment underpinned by research excellence and impactful engagement activity.

A particularly distinctive feature of the University is its College system, which plays a central role in the life and experience of Lancaster's students, from welcoming and integrating students into the University to creating lasting student communities. Each of Lancaster's nine Colleges has a Principal, a Manager and a team of College Advisors who provide support to students, complementing Academic Tutor roles in the departments. Each undergraduate College also has an elected Junior Common Room (JCR) Executive. The Students' Union facilitate the JCR elections and support the executives to work in collaboration with their Senior Common Room (the staff equivalent to JCRs) to organise activities to engage students in the College.

The Colleges and Lancaster University Students' Union (LUSU) together offer many different kinds of opportunity and experience that complement Lancaster's core academic activities. These enable students to develop their potential across a broad range of endeavours, including volunteering opportunities, sporting and social activities. Our Lancaster Award scheme encourages students to

obtain recognition for a range of extra-curricular activities, including those specifically related to employability and enterprise (section 4.1.2).

The formal relationship between the University and the Students' Union is defined in a code of practice. They have together developed the Student Charter, which sets out the general principles of the partnership between students, the University and the Students' Union. This is reviewed on an annual basis and promoted to students by both the University and LUSU. Each year a set of key priorities is agreed between the University and LUSU to support the further enhancement of student experience. LUSU have participated in the preparation of the TEF submission through membership of a steering group, and their commentary on specific points is situated throughout this document.²

Lancaster's research-led and student-focused environment is built upon a strong culture of dialogue with students and staff that informs developments across our practice. This was recognised in the 2015 HER as *a feature of good practice* - "The review team considers the distinctive culture of partnership, and environment of engagement, developed through the collegiate system, to be good practice." The role and approach of our staff, both academic and professional, within this culture of partnership is critical and underpins the quality of our teaching.

2. Teaching Quality

Lancaster's commitment to continuous improvement of its teaching quality is reflected in the University's strategic priorities and new Education Strategy. Our metrics indicate very strong performance for teaching quality with positive indicators for both the core metrics, including a flag. This section presents additional evidence to support our positive performance, and to explain our split metrics, focused on three aspects: student engagement; valuing teaching; and assessment and feedback.

2.1 Student Engagement

Lancaster's recognised good practice in relation to partnership working and student engagement³ underpins our strong performance in teaching quality. The Strategic Plan commits Lancaster to: "develop even closer and more interactive relationships with our students". Fundamental to achieving this is the assurance that the student voice is not only heard, but plays a central role in decision-making. Diverse and effective mechanisms for engagement with students are core to our way of working and include committees, surveys, roadshows, carousels and joint working groups, together with significant and effective informal networks through which students' views are shared with University and LUSU members, and then channelled through more formal processes.

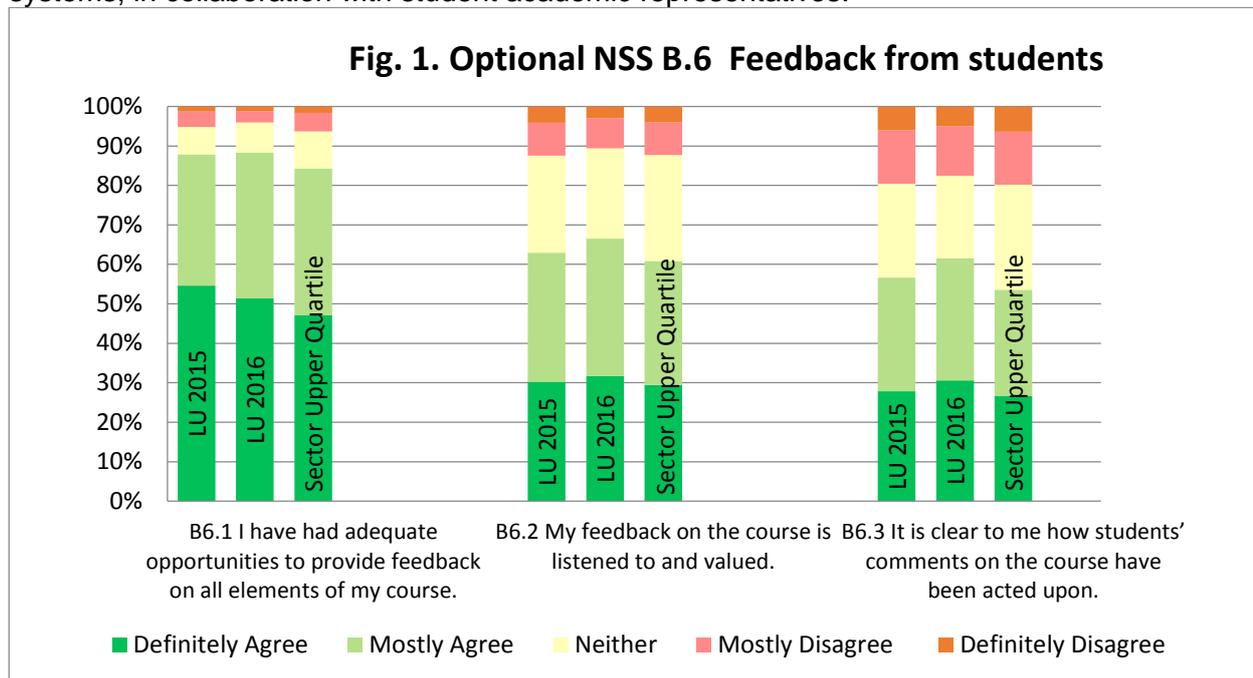
The impact of our approach to student engagement is illustrated by data from the NSS optional questions – based on 1971 final year students in 2015 (74% response rate) and 2230 final year students in 2016 (78%).

NSS questions B6.1-3 address feedback from students. Fig.1 shows that Lancaster is in the upper quartile of sector results in terms of opportunities to provide feedback on their course, the value that is seen to be placed on student feedback and the visible use of that feedback. Our efforts to communicate the use of student feedback are particularly evident in QB6.3 with 62% of students in 2016 agreeing it is clear how their comments have been acted upon (up from 40% in 2010). LUSU

² LUSU have collaborated in the University's TEF submission. They wish to note, however, their disagreement with the government's intended plans to link TEF outcomes to tuition fees.

³ Reference HER comments as utilised in section 1.4

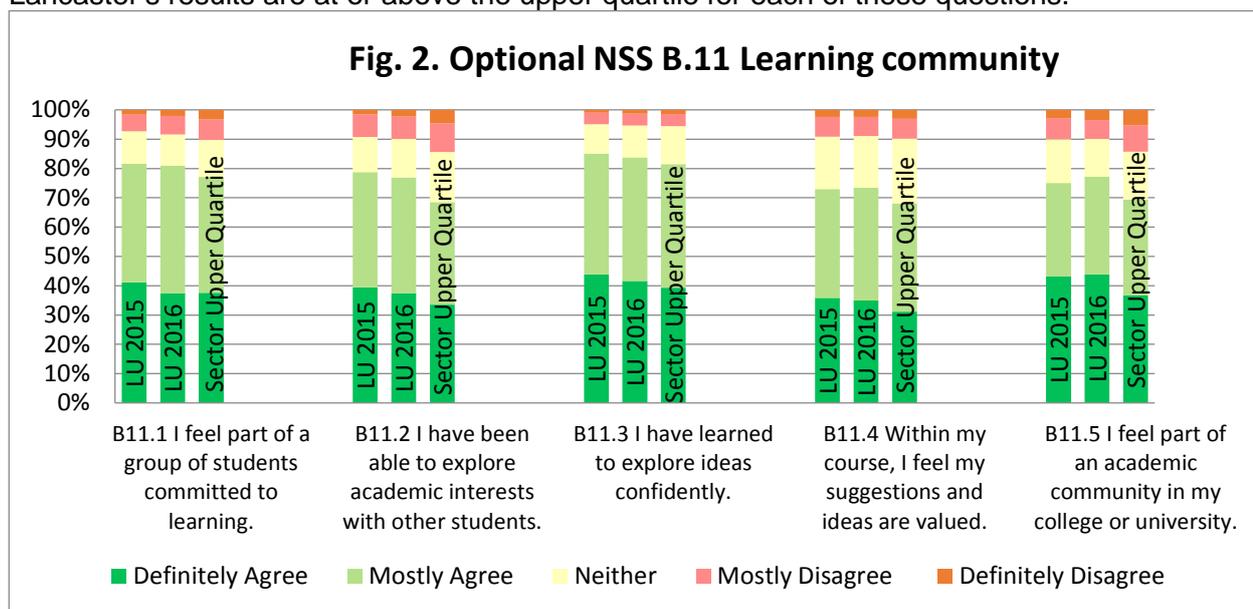
commend this improvement and the University's commitment to further enhance feedback systems, in collaboration with student academic representatives.



Examples of strategic enhancements made to teaching as a result of student feedback, which we believe underlie our strong performance in this period, include:

- Investment in academic staffing with the impact that Staff-Student Ratios have improved from 15.4 in 2011-12 to 13.2 in 2015-16.
- Strengthening and refinement of the Academic Tutor system (section 3.1)
- Improvements to assessment and feedback policies and practices (section 2.3)
- Greater opportunity for the recognition of excellent teaching through the University Staff Awards and the student-led Teaching Awards scheme (section 2.2)

NSS questions B11.1 to B11.4 address student engagement in their learning community. Lancaster's results are at or above the upper quartile for each of these questions.



Lancaster has participated in the Higher Education Academy's (HEA) UK Engagement Survey (UKES) since 2014. Q3.1 of the UKES – “worked with other students on course projects or assignments” - again shows that Lancaster performs well (94%, sector mean 93%). The UKES response rates for Lancaster, although higher than the sector average, are low (<15%), however, when triangulated with the NSS data above, these data suggest that Lancaster's teaching is particularly effective in encouraging collaborative learning.

Through implementing its Strategic Plan, Lancaster continues to work with its students to extend opportunities for them to engage with their learning and enhance the quality of teaching provided. The University adopted the recommendations from the 2015 HER Student Written Submission and a collaborative action plan has been implemented. Led by LUSU, Lancaster is currently one of a small number of institutions involved in piloting a range of student voice mechanisms to assess their effectiveness and usefulness in the new HEFCE quality assessment arrangements.

2.2 Valuing Teaching

Underpinning Lancaster's strategic priority and success in the Teaching Quality aspect is the value we place on teaching excellence at all levels within our wider organisational structures and processes. Lancaster expects as a norm that academic staff will contribute across all three professional areas: research, teaching, and academic leadership and engagement. As a result, the proportion of academic staff involved in both teaching and research is amongst the highest in the sector. Among research-intensive universities, Lancaster ranks 4th with 88% of core teaching staff active in research (range 51-93%).⁴

2.2.1 Initiating and Rewarding Excellence

To pass probation, all academic staff are required to meet a minimum benchmark standard in teaching. This includes a requirement to demonstrate a commitment to the on-going development of their teaching practice via successful engagement with a recognised HEA UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) accredited programme, such as the Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice (PgCAP) or, for more experienced staff, the Advancing Teaching: Lancaster Accreditation Scheme (ATLAS).

For academic staff already in post, Lancaster's promotion processes continue this focus on teaching and research. All promotions to Senior Lecturer and Professor need to demonstrate the individual's effective contribution to teaching and provide evidence of on-going development. Promotions criteria were modified in 2014 to better align with the University's emphasis on teaching and academic leadership. As a result the promotions scheme has progressed from having a research focus to one which actively welcomes balanced cases and, for Senior Lecturers, cases that major on either teaching, research or academic leadership and engagement. As a result, over the last two years, 41% of our successful academic promotion cases for Senior Lecturers and above were either “balanced” or teaching-led. This is a total of 51 staff in two years who have been promoted with teaching excellence being the largest, or equal largest part of their case. Further developments to the promotions criteria in 2016, to include professorial promotions majoring on any of the three aspects of practice, mean that the promotions system is now fully aligned with our strategic objective for teaching excellence.

2.2.2 Recognising and Celebrating Teaching Excellence

The University's leadership place a high value on supporting, recognising and rewarding exceptional teaching. The most public statement of this recognition is the annual Staff Awards. Since 1991, Lancaster has awarded the Pilkington Teaching Award for teaching excellence to

⁴ Source: 2014-15 HESA data. T & R academic staff as % of (T only + T & R)

individuals or teams who have demonstrated exceptional practice in this area. In addition to receiving a prize of £1,000, winners are publicly celebrated during our degree ceremonies and at the Staff Awards Dinner hosted by the Vice-Chancellor.

There is a noticeable alignment between the Pilkington Teaching Award and Lancaster's continued success in the prestigious HEA National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS). Lancaster has had 13 winners of the NTFS, two of these within the last three years. Five of the NTFS winners had previously won Pilkington Teaching Awards while two others have won the Community Prize and the Outstanding Contribution Award respectively. In wider terms, Lancaster's NTFS winners stem from a pool of 32 applications since the scheme began in 2000. Both NTFS winners and applicants receive additional internal recognition and are key champions for strategic teaching initiatives, such as thematic reviews or the development of innovative approaches to teaching practice.

The internal celebration and recognition of those demonstrating teaching excellence signifies the culture of collegiality and sharing practice that is a key strength of Lancaster. That so many of these colleagues have been supported in making successful applications to the NTFS, thereby receiving external recognition for their teaching, reflects our commitment to teaching excellence as a strategic priority. The University was very supportive of the introduction of the annual Students' Union's Lancaster University Teaching Award in 2012, which provides an additional route by which excellent teaching can be acknowledged and celebrated, via the student voice directly.

2.2.3 Developing Teaching Excellence

Opportunities for initial and continuing development of teaching form a key element of Lancaster's professional development provision. This is delivered via the Organisation & Educational Development (OED) Team within the HR Division. Tailored to recognise the varying career stage and experience of our staff, the University's educational development offer is comprehensive and aligned to all four fellowship categories of the HEA. The success of programmes for new and experienced staff - the Supporting Learning Programme, the PgCAP and ATLAS - is evident in the continuing rise in participation across these programmes and successful completion rates; for instance 96% for PgCAP over the last two years. The impact of Lancaster's investment in this area can be seen in the continued increase of staff gaining professional recognition against the UKPSF, up from 517 HEA recognised staff at all levels in 2015 to 698 staff in 2016.

In recognition and support of Lancaster's international practice, a variant of the PgCAP is delivered by OED within Lancaster's partnerships in Malaysia and Ghana, and in China as from October 2017. Increasingly, this geographical reach is enabling interactions between Lancaster-based staff and those within the partnerships as they engage in professional development. The impact of these centrally coordinated opportunities for teaching enhancement is augmented by multiple peer-development activities, such as departmental and Faculty learning and teaching forums and University-wide 'Sharing Practice' workshops and conference days. For example, during 2015-16 a range of sharing practice events focused on issues of student retention and transition.

2.3 Assessment and Feedback

Lancaster's commitment to best practice in assessment and feedback is embedded within our institutional processes for teaching, quality assurance and enhancement. The University's Annual Teaching Review process asks a series of questions of assessment and feedback at programme, Department and Faculty level. Similarly, our system of Periodic Quality Review of Departments, conducted every 4 to 5 years, has a section devoted to the examination of assessment and its role in student development. These procedures facilitate scrutiny of, and reflection on, patterns of assessment, assessment outcomes, support and guidance and the identification and dissemination of effective practice. Each requires the examination of data and examples of good practice and ensures that specific actions for improvement are identified.

Institutional initiatives to drive improvements around assessment and feedback during the reference period include:

- a. The introduction in 2010-11 of a new grading system to provide a more consistent grading framework across subject areas. The system was reviewed in 2015-16 after the first three graduating cohorts and was deemed to have achieved its principal objectives without prompting grade inflation. The new system supports more consistent and simpler approaches to issues such as re-assessment, condonation and missing work to yield a fairer and more robust system for students.
- b. The introduction of an institutional framework for the setting and use of criteria to help ensure students understand how assessment judgements are made. There are early signs of impact from this work: in recent years scores for the NSS question on “the criteria used in marking have been clear in advance” have improved from 70% in 2013 to 75% in 2016.
- c. The introduction in 2009 of a maximum turnaround time of four weeks for marking and feedback on all coursework, to improve the timeliness and usefulness of feedback to students. For some types of assessment, turnaround times are much shorter – the four-week maximum period is intended to allow for the full range of assessment types whilst maintaining high quality feedback for more complex tasks or for large student groups. In 2014, recognising that timeliness of feedback required improvement, stronger promotion of timely feedback and closer institutional monitoring of departments was introduced. In parallel, LUSU have led a student campaign on this issue since 2014. The early evidence from the relevant NSS question “Feedback on my work has been prompt” showed improvement from 70% in 2013 to 74% in 2016.

The University recognises the importance of timeliness of feedback not being at the expense of its quality, or value to students, and ensured that both aspects were promoted in its institutional initiatives. In parallel with the improvement of NSS scores around timeliness of feedback, the relevant NSS question “Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand” has provided evidence of improvement, increasing from 63% in 2013 to 68% in 2016.

2.3.1 Continuous Improvement of Assessment and Feedback

The metric for Assessment and Feedback shows a difference between the core metric and split metrics. Specifically, the core is not flagged but the split metrics for BME students and for Disadvantaged students have a positive and a negative flag, respectively. However, the split metrics for disadvantaged students also show that, compared to benchmark, these students achieve very good ‘Student Outcomes and Learning Gain’ with positive flags for each metric. The negative flag for Assessment and Feedback may reflect evidence we have gathered indicating that the transition to higher education shows some particular challenges for disadvantaged students. Lancaster’s thematic review of learning development in 2014-15 has resulted in several initiatives to enhance development, including in the critical transition phases (into Year 1 and Year 1 to Year 2) and significant increases in OFFA expenditure committed for 2017-18 to expand direct support to Widening Participation (WP) students.

The split metrics show a positive flag for BME students on assessment and feedback, alongside a double positive flag for those students for ‘teaching on my course’. While there is some overlap between BME and disadvantaged students, the former category also includes many non-UK students for the NSS indicators. These positive split metric flags for BME students reflect the University’s efforts concerning inclusivity and recognition of the international student profile in its teaching and assessment practices.

The evidence above shows a continuously improving picture for the University on assessment and feedback. LUSU endorse these improvements while working with the University to achieve further gains in key aspects such as formative assessment for learning. There are areas of excellent local practice reflected in strong NSS scores considerably above the relevant sector means (e.g. Business, Medicine, Maths, Performing Arts). The challenge is to ensure consistently stronger performance across the University, partly by ensuring that local good practice is shared more effectively. The University is currently engaged in a review of all processes around assessment and feedback, in collaboration with its students, with the aim of meeting this challenge.

The University's strong performance in relation to teaching quality is enabled by the learning environment at Lancaster. This environment is one in which support is intertwined at all levels, for all learners, within an outstanding physical and virtual estate.

3. Learning Environment

Lancaster's learning environment encapsulates our focus on student-centric approaches. This focus is captured in the unique culture fostered by our College system, specific initiatives such as our demand-led timetabling system and our innovative iLancaster app, which place control in the students' hands, and the active inclusion of students across our decision-making structures. The impact of this approach can be seen in Lancaster's sustained efforts to enhance the support available for all students throughout their studies. The following section provides additional evidence on the quality of Lancaster's learning environment.

3.1 Academic Support

Lancaster's strategy for effective academic support is aimed at ensuring all students are enabled to engage in their learning and to develop and succeed at the highest levels. Examples of institutional initiatives to enhance academic support through personalised learning approaches, during the reference period, include:

- A strategic refresh of the role of Student Learning Advisers in Faculties with the impact that the 2015 HER noted "evidence of the Faculty-student learning advisers providing a flexible range of workshops and other support that addresses individual and group needs";
- Strengthened involvement by the Colleges in academic support and co-ordination with departments, contributing to the 2015 HER *feature of good practice*⁵;
- Strengthening of the Academic Tutor (AT) system - for example to enhance support for students in making study choices, and to ensure greater consistency in provision through AT Co-ordinators, who structure, monitor and support contact between students and ATs.

Other factors contributing to excellent Academic Support include:

- A collaborative project between the Students' Union and the Library to develop and publish clearer guidance for students on good practice for academic referencing and how to avoid inadvertent plagiarism, which is available to students on all level of study, all year round;
- The University's Student-Based Services Division, often in conjunction with LUSU, offers personalised support on matters which may impact negatively on academic success, such as physical and mental health, disability and money problems;
- Academic support for students with disabilities via an Inclusive Learning and Support Plan which is created in consultation with the student and implemented with relevant staff;
- Learning support provided by the Academic Services Division in the Library which has dedicated advisers for different groups of subjects, as well as specialist support for students

⁵ Reference HER comments as utilised in section 1.4

with dyslexia and distance learners, deploying a wide range of resources designed to support students in their learning;

- High-quality support and advice for students studying away from Lancaster, as guaranteed in Study Abroad agreements with Lancaster's overseas partners;
- Workload models operated by academic departments which recognise the significant time required for learning support roles to be carried out effectively.

The impact of these initiatives is reflected in our very positive metrics for Academic Support, including a flag for the most recent year as initiatives have become embedded. The split metrics further demonstrate our excellence in relation to academic support. These include:

- A positive flag for "First degree" students, who make up 99.8% of the UG student body;
- A double positive flag for BME students, reflecting the University's successful efforts in supporting its diverse student community, including its many international students (also indicated in the positive flags for non-UK students);
- Positive indicators above benchmarks across sub-groups, including a positive flag for Female students.

Additional evidence for the effectiveness of the University's support comes from both national and internal student surveys. Responses to NSS optional questions on the availability and helpfulness of welfare support showed a satisfaction rate of 86% for students from SEC 4-7 and 82% for students from SEC 1-3, compared with a national upper quartile figure for all students of 80%.

3.2 Supporting Retention, Attainment and Progression

As outlined in 3.1, our strategy aims to ensure all students can succeed at the highest levels. Our student profile, including a strong WP representation and a significant proportion of international students, means that effective engagement with students to understand needs and challenges, and a commitment to personalised learning, are core to our strategy.

Our commitment to improving student retention and achievement is a key driver behind the extensive work Lancaster does, including with LUSU, to support its diverse student community. The core metrics show that Lancaster's non-continuation rate is higher than its benchmark, though with no flag. Misclassified data are responsible for the only split metric for non-continuation with a negative flag, our very small number of "Other UG" students⁶. For five students the qualification aim and qualification awarded were in fact the same (Certificate at Level H), but in the HESA data the qualification awarded was wrongly recorded as "Credits at Level H". If these five students are classified correctly the non-completion rate for Other UG students becomes 8.0%, well below the threshold for a negative flag, which would leave no sub-group with a negative flag for this metric.

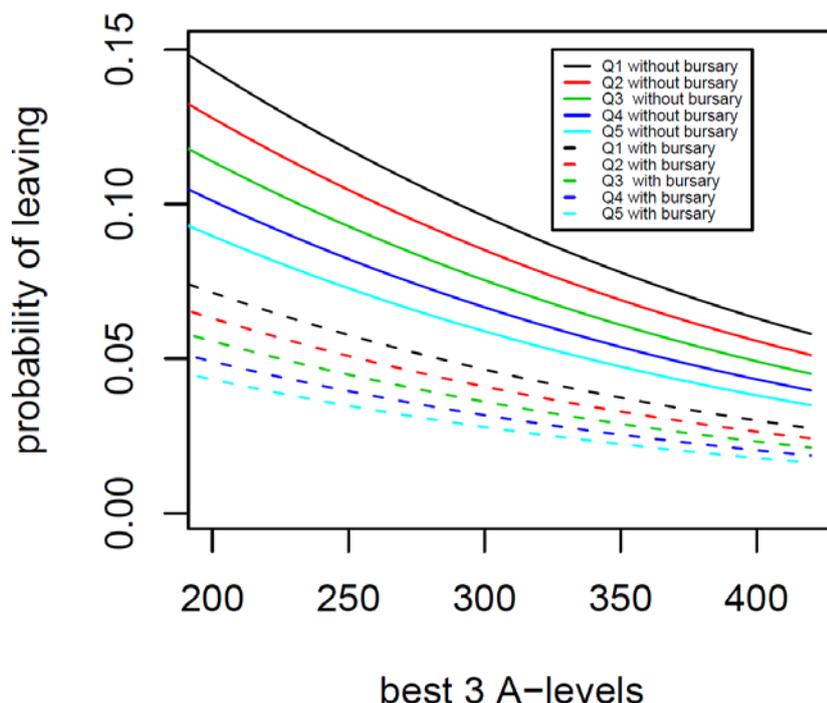
Detailed analysis of our data has shown that over half of non-completers leave in their first year and that, for example, students on the autistic spectrum and those with mental health difficulties are more likely to withdraw. This has resulted in investment, in 2016-17, in two new Transition Officer posts, at a cost of £40k per annum, to support these learners directly through orientation packages tailored to specific groups at high risk of withdrawal.

Analysis of our student data also shows that students from target WP groups are more likely not to complete their studies. The University therefore has a long-standing bursary scheme, which over the last three years has provided direct financial support to around 2,800 lower income students in each year at a total cost of £10.9M. An analysis of the scheme's impact has shown that (after

⁶ Notified to HEFCE although not classified as a necessary amendment to the provider metrics

allowing for other factors such as entry grades) students in receipt of financial support are more likely to complete their studies (Fig. 3). The analysis also showed that this impact is more marked for students in the lower participating POLAR quintiles.

Fig. 3 Probability of non-completion by entry levels and POLAR quintile



In this context, it should be noted that the TEF benchmark figure for non-continuation is not adjusted for WP indicators, and this is likely to impact on Lancaster's metric as our proportion of students from lower participating neighbourhoods is consistently higher than our HESA benchmark.

3.3 Pre-Arrival, Induction and Orientation

Student engagement is a key focus for Lancaster from pre-arrival to Welcome Week activities and beyond. Welcome Week in particular has been transformed over the last two years with the Colleges, LUSU, academic Departments, Faculties and Professional Services working together to offer a wide variety of opportunities to all students to ensure they get to know other students, settle in well and are ready to start their studies.

The 2016 Students' Union: First Impressions Survey provides evidence of the success of the University's approach:

- 99% of students engaged with Welcome Week activities and 98% were satisfied with them;
- While 47% had concerns about starting University before they arrived at Lancaster, following induction activity 83% of these students felt 'their concerns had been alleviated';
- 88% believed that "there are opportunities for me and I know how to get involved";
- 87% felt the Students' Union made a positive contribution to their Welcome Week.

Guarantees to new students about accommodation on campus leads to 95% of our first-year students living on campus and the University places great importance on ensuring that they are made to feel welcome, safe and supported from day one. We have been rated the UK's Best University Halls six times since 2010 in the annual National Student Housing Survey (NSHS). In

the 2016 NSHS, Lancaster was the only university to gain more than one award. We were rated top in three categories: Best Moving In Experience, Best Booking Experience, and Best Learning Environment for our Grizedale Townhouse accommodation.

3.4 Colleges and the Student Experience

The Colleges are central to the student experience and Lancaster's approach to student learning and support, providing much more than halls of residence. The College structures, facilities and activities bring together students – including non-residential students - from a wide variety of academic and social backgrounds to create supportive communities with distinct identities.

Every Lancaster student has access to pastoral support from a designated College Advisor. This Advisor works closely with the student's Departmental Academic Tutor should any academic difficulties arise. Beyond academic matters, College pastoral support has been further strengthened by the recent introduction of College Wellbeing officers in 2015-16. These posts, which have been created at a cost of £100k per annum, provide additional support for individual students and the development of co-ordinated College-based activities and campaigns. The Students' Union also collaborates with the University in this area, for example to support a recreational activity programme to enhance student wellbeing - Just Play.

The biennial Lancaster Student Experience Survey showed that in 2015, 83% of UK first-year students and 74% of non-UK first-year students believed that their College provides a valuable sense of community and that 87% of UK students and 82% of non-UK students believed they had sufficient support from their College.

3.5 Learning in a Research-Intensive Environment

As set out in section 1, Lancaster's leading research environment and our commitment to research-stimulated teaching, provide the context within which our students learn. Our educational provision is designed and taught by our world-class academic community (section 2.2), enabling cutting-edge thinking to stimulate the design of our programmes and enrich the learning opportunities they provide. Examples of the impact of this environment include:

- Learning opportunities and links to employers through Lancaster's embedded culture of enterprise and entrepreneurship together with strategic investment (e.g. more than £500k of Higher Education Innovation Funding to secure European Regional Development Fund funding for a four-year student start-up support project). An audit of opportunities in 2015-16 identified nearly 150 curricular and extra-curricular interventions, all involving dimensions of learning-through-doing, risk-taking and reflection. Many interventions are developed around specific curricular modules to help reinforce learning outcomes. The impact of this culture is reflected in our employability-related outcomes (section 4.1.2).
- Extensive opportunities for students to enhance their learning experience through international activity, ranging from study abroad periods through to shorter-term experiences such as *Your Global Experience*, an initiative delivered collaboratively by academic departments, international research collaborators and LUSU.

The existence and benefits of such opportunities are frequently cited by students in their open comments when surveyed, including in the NSS where they underpin the University's outstanding performance on Q. 22 – students' overall satisfaction – 91% in 2016 (sector mean 86%, upper quartile 90%).

Students' engagement with research increases as their studies progress. Earlier in the course, learning about research methods and understanding existing research might be emphasised, while later on this might lead onto conducting a form of original research project or dissertation. Evidence from the 2016 UKES data shows that the percentage of students having a good level of active participation in research is 72% by the end of year 1, increasing to over 90% by year 3. The impact of this participation is reflected in the results for questions 2.1 – 2.4 on critical thinking skills, where Lancaster's scores for 'very much' or 'quite a bit' range from 73 to 85%, exceeding the sector mean scores by 2 to 5 percentage points.

3.6 Organisation, Management and Learning Resources

Our commitment to an excellent learning environment is reflected in the strong organisation and the investment in, and effective use of, learning resources.

Examples of our strong organisation of the learning environment include:

- A demand-led timetabling system whereby students make provisional choices of modules and the timetable is then constructed in such a way as to accommodate as many as possible of these choices;
- The University's robust student-focused structures, with a devolved but co-ordinated administration system whereby programme leaders and administrators are located within Departments and develop close relationships with students and an excellent understanding of their needs;
- The provision of personalised timetables and communications regarding any necessary changes via the Student Portal, linked to Moodle sites for every module.

The impact of our approach is supported by evidence from the NSS, specifically Questions 13-15 where Lancaster's satisfaction scores significantly exceed the sector means, resulting in a score for the overall theme of Organisation and Management in 2016 of 86% (sector average 79%, upper quartile 84%).

Our excellent Learning Resources are underpinned by strong investment and innovation.

Examples include:

- As part of our digital enhancements, our mobile application – iLancaster - is designed to support all aspects of the student experience. Designed by the University, iLancaster consistently leads the field in terms of the range of applications it provides and has won multiple national awards. Critically, most new developments within the application have been generated and developed by students with the support of Lancaster's Information Systems Services teams.
- Capital expenditure of nearly £54M over the 3-year period on 12 academic-related buildings, including new builds for Engineering, Chemistry and the Lancaster Institute for Contemporary Arts;
- A further £13M investment in refurbishment and expansion of the Library in 2014-15. This has resulted in greatly increased usage; occupancy figures for a typical week in term time have risen from approximately 25,000 before the refurbishment to approximately 40,000 following completion, and increased student satisfaction according to our LibQUAL+ survey;
- A strategic shift to the Library's digital content available 24/7 from any location; the access rate of e-books per FTE and the ratio of e-book accesses to book accesses are both top decile figures within the UK HE sector;
- Investment in the dedicated Learning Zone facility to complement the Library refurbishment, by increasing students' access to flexible learning space that adapts to their particular needs and provides dedicated space for learning development opportunities.

Our strategic approach to resource provision was recognised by the 2015 HER as reflecting “the University’s commitment to student achievement” and the review considered the “effective resourcing of new taught curriculum areas at the University” to be *a feature of good practice*. The impact of our investment and innovation is further supported by evidence from the NSS, specifically Questions 16-18 where Lancaster’s satisfaction scores significantly exceed the sector mean, resulting in a score for the overall theme of Learning Resources in 2016 of 91% (sector average 86%, upper quartile 88%). Furthermore, the investment in refurbishment of the Library and other study areas, raised student satisfaction with learning resources from the mid-80%, through 80% during peak building works in 2015, to the new high of 91% in 2016.

The evidence above demonstrates the excellence across different facets of Lancaster’s learning environment. The University is ambitious to build further on this, endorsed by LUSU, in order to ensure that all students are enabled to succeed at the highest levels

4. Student Outcomes

Lancaster is focused on providing an excellent educational experience for all, within an environment that recognises and responds to student diversity and provides comprehensive support mechanisms alongside opportunities for students to excel. It is this focus that underpins the University’s very strong performance across the metrics for student outcomes.

4.1 Enhancing Employability

The QAA HER 2015 report commended the wide range of employability and enterprise activities and support at all levels of the University, within and outside of the curriculum. The HER report went on to acknowledge that the University has invested significantly to increase and diversify the range of opportunities to develop student employability. LUSU have endorsed the University’s success, noting that Lancaster provides a broad range of high quality employability support to students, with the priority in future to improve communication and targeting of the support and opportunities available.

This positive recognition is in part due to the outcomes of the ‘Thematic Review of Employability’, undertaken by a panel of internal and external experts in July 2015. The review commended our current activity and provided twelve recommendations to be addressed by a series of dedicated working groups drawing membership from across the institution. This has generated an increased awareness and understanding of employability and its significance for recruitment, student experience, graduate destinations and employer engagement.

4.1.1 Ongoing Success

The success of Lancaster’s work to enhance employability and support positive outcomes is captured by the core metrics showing positive flags for ‘employment or further study’ and ‘highly skilled employment or further study’. Reflecting Lancaster’s strategic initiatives to support success for all students, these positive flags extend across all the split metrics.

This very positive performance is particularly notable given Lancaster’s geographical situation. Our location means that proximate access to graduate employers is limited and employers are required to dedicate significant time and resource to visit our campus. Yet these challenges are actively addressed for the benefits of our students; we typically host over 150 graduate employers on campus each year and last year 2,638 employers advertised 10,419 job opportunities to our students and graduates via our online portal.

The majority of our UK students are recruited from the North West of England and 44% of our students take up their first graduate position in the region, 52% of these in Lancashire. While this fact aligns with our values and our role in developing the local region and providing high class education within this context, our students who remain in the region earn lower salaries than those

starting their first graduate position in the South East of England, for example. In Lancashire only 29% of graduates employed will earn over £20,000, compared to 86% employed in London. Again, Lancaster has proactively addressed this challenge. Recognising that the South East bias extends to the location of recruitment and selection activities, Lancaster has set up a fund to support travel to interviews and assessment centres for WP students.

4.1.2 Organisation and Delivery of Employability Support

Our strong performance and impact on student outcomes can be attributed to the continuous improvement of our support for employability and to the range of initiatives we have developed in this space. Key examples include:

- Each year around 600 students sign up to the extra-curricular Lancaster Award skills development programme, a mechanism by which students are rewarded for developing transferable skills through a mixture of work experience, development activity, volunteering and engagement in campus-based activities. Approximately 300 of those who sign up go on to attain the Award in their penultimate year of study. In 2015 we remodelled the Lancaster Award to enable students to build it around their own interests and future career plans. The impact of these changes is evidenced by the fact that Lancaster Award achievers are 6% more likely to be in graduate level work and / or further study than those who have not completed the Award.
- Appointment of departmental Academic Employability Champions who work closely with professional careers staff to develop a bespoke departmental employability plan based on data from DLHE, NSS and other student feedback.
- Investment in specialist Careers Tutors who augment the work of careers staff, and support students to access highly competitive careers (e.g. Accounting, Finance and Marketing).
- Extensive enterprise opportunities, an example of impact being that during 2014/15 the number of trading student start-up businesses we supported was 28. Among earlier start-ups, 37 have now been trading for over three years. We have 50 Entrepreneurs in Residence who teach and advise students.
- Increased opportunities for work experience available to students including projects, internships and placements. In the Management School, for example, those students who have taken a year in industry lifted the positive destination figure for students undertaking a placement from 89% to 94% in 2014/15. We are building on this excellent performance to embed such opportunities within degree schemes across our academic portfolio.
- The Employment and Recruitment Service, established in 2014, is a professional in-house recruitment agency offering temporary, part-time and ad-hoc work across campus and within the local area. From May to October 2016, 1601 unique individuals gained employment via the Service. A recent internal survey showed students undertaking this work had significantly improved their key transferable skills in areas such as communication, customer/client focus, decision making, team working and networking.

The Students' Union also plays a key role in the organisation and delivery of employability support through its clubs and societies, JCRs and volunteering initiatives. In 2016, LUSU had 7,969 students participating in its clubs and societies and 641 student volunteers. These activities not only provide practical skills to students, helping them enhance their employability, but are aimed at supporting retention and student community cohesion. LUSU's schools volunteer team also supported 341 students to develop employability skills directly through their projects.

4.2 Ensuring Successful Outcomes for All

Our split metrics demonstrate that all sub-groups of students achieve these very positive outcomes. We recognise that some groups need particular support to achieve this success and have built our provision accordingly. For example,

- The Careers Mentoring Officer has worked closely with the disability team to encourage more students with a disability to take advantage of the Career Mentoring Programme. The

impact of this has been a doubling of the number of students with a disability who engaged with the programme from 5% in 2014/5 to 10% in 2015/6.

- Specialist events and courses are targeted at WP students, for example 'Talent Has No Boundaries' and 'Frontrunner Leadership Course'.
- Lancaster participated in the HEFCE Postgraduate Support Scheme in 2015-16, offering 146 match-funded scholarships for Masters' courses. Our drive to ensure this initiative reached its target beneficiaries – with criteria including at least one WP indicator– resulted in a 92% take-up rate, significantly increasing access for WP students across the postgraduate taught portfolio. Our evaluation of the scheme showed that 44% of respondents said that being awarded a PSS award was the single-most important deciding factor in pursuing their chosen programme and without it they would have been unable to progress onto postgraduate study.

5. Concluding Remarks

Lancaster's focus on teaching excellence, stimulated by world-class research, runs through the core of our institutional strategies, structures and processes and is shaped by our values of collegiality, partnership and innovation. The value we place on teaching that enables all of our students to succeed and fulfil their potential, is reflected in our approach to the on-going development, support, recognition and promotion of staff at all levels.

The impact of this focus is evidenced within Lancaster's excellent performance for teaching quality, as captured in section 2 and in both the core metrics, including a positive flag. Underpinned by our work to enhance student engagement and to reward excellent teaching, we are committed to continuous improvement in key aspects such as assessment and feedback and support of student learning.

In parallel, Lancaster's strategy recognises the central importance of the environment within which this learning takes place. Our award-winning campus, residences and important College system create the backdrop against which the University continues to invest in and enhance student support. This investment directly responds to the diversity of our student body, aiming to support student success for all. The impact of our initiatives in this space is reflected in the evidence presented in section 3, including our very positive metrics for academic support, with a positive flag for the most recent year of activity, as this focus pays dividends. The University is now directly engaged in building on these excellent outcomes to further enhance retention, attainment and progression through our work on student bursaries, orientation, student support, and learning development.

The success of Lancaster's focus on teaching quality within a student-centric learning environment is strongly evident within our exceptional metrics for student outcomes (section 4), showing positive flags for both core metrics that extend across the split metrics. That this success has been recognised by both the QAA HER and LUSU is further testament to the efforts we have made in relation to this aspect. Lancaster's ambition is to realise the benefits of our continued work in this area, ensuring successful outcomes for all.