Name of Provider: The University of Northampton
UKPRN: [10007138]

TEF Year Two provider submission
Provider Context

The University of Northampton's mission is to transform lives and inspire change. We do this by putting our students at the heart of our strategic plan *Transforming Lives + Inspiring Change*. As a member of the international Ashoka U[1] group of universities (an accredited *Changemaker* campus), we are committed to our *Changemaker* values, which focus on higher education to achieve a positive social impact. These values underpin all our teaching, learning, employability, research and enterprise. This focus extends through:

- the **quality of the student experience** including the continuous development of our 'active blended' learning model through our *Redesign* agenda. Active blended learning focuses on structured student-centred interactive activities that integrate face-to-face (primarily) and on-line learning and teaching in order to develop subject knowledge and understanding, graduate employability skills, digital fluency and independent learning;
- a commitment to engaging with **students as partners**, including their full participation in this TEF submission;
- **continuous improvement** through systematic **action planning** underpinned by **benchmarked data** (including equality and diversity indices);
- **investment** in an outstanding **student experience** for current students across two campuses whilst developing a £330M **brand-new, purpose-built,** state-of-the-art Waterside **campus (**2018**).** Investment is in staffing and staff development as well as IT, physical resources and space to deliver a personalised learning environment;
- **post-study progression** to enable students from all backgrounds to gain **highly skilled jobs** and make a **positive social impact** in their communities. We achieve this by developing graduate skills that combine our *Changemaker* values alongside graduate employment and digital skills; we acknowledge that for some graduates the time-frame is longer and our commitment is therefore to on-going post-study support. Our *Redesign* agenda has emphasised the importance of embedding authentic work-based learning activities, including placements and assessment within the curriculum in parallel to the extensive co-curricular opportunities; and
- institutional alignment of **strategic plan targets** with team and individual staff **objectives**.

We are proud to have achieved our strategic goal to be '**number one university in the UK for Social Enterprise**'. Our social impact agenda is well served by our strength in **community-based research**, identified in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework as **world-leading**. As the only university in Northamptonshire, we have embraced our responsibility to lever social outcomes and opportunities for our communities through setting *Changemaker Challenges* in conjunction with our external partners and the local community. Our students play a key role in helping to design and implement the *Challenges,* which also carries benefits for our graduates, given the comparatively limited graduate employment in Northamptonshire (as identified in the TEF employment context maps) (SO1 and SO2). We also provide every student with the opportunity to undertake a paid internship, placement or other form of work related learning in a social enterprise and/or community organisation.

The University is organised into academic units - Faculties (Arts, Science and Technology; Business and Law; Education and Humanities; and Health and Society); Research and Enterprise; and Partnership - grouped to encourage cross-disciplinary approaches to learning and teaching and research and enterprise. In addition, centralised Professional Services provide consistent high quality services for students and staff. Student and Academic Services is the largest of these, and enables the delivery of an integrated learning environment that includes the key student-facing areas of Library and Learning Services, Institute of Learning and Teaching (ILT) and University Centre for Employability and Engagement (UCEE)/Changemaker Hub. ILT, established in 2013,

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[1] Ashoka U is a global network of social entrepreneurs that works to nurture cultures of social innovation across university campuses

has a remit to enable transformational learning experiences through inspirational teaching, with responsibility for academic staff development, active blended learning, and pedagogic research. UCEE/Changemaker Hub, also established in 2013, leads on both the integration of employability across the academic curriculum and extra-curricular student experience, in a way that contributes to our *Changemaker* mission to have a positive social impact.

Through this structure, the University is committed to an holistic approach to delivering an **exceptional student experience for all**. Our academic governance structures affirm the importance of excellence in teaching through the establishment of two first level Senate committees to oversee Student Experience and Academic Quality and Standards. The Inclusive Student Experience Group provides further scrutiny and focus on ensuring positive outcomes for all students. Membership of all these committees is drawn from academic and professional service staff and students. Students and, where appropriate, employers, participate in University formal processes and projects.

We have an **integrated approach to Quality Assurance and Quality Enhancement**, providing consistency, alignment and clear direction of travel in relation to strategic and operational targets. Teaching teams meet regularly each term to interrogate centrally produced quantitative and qualitative evidence and use it to plan actions for continuous improvement through targeted intervention. A system of 'traffic light' quality data dashboards has been in place for four years and reports performance against University thresholds and targets across an extensive range of student performance measures, including student feedback, assessment, attainment, and continuation. All University quality reports contain a full analysis by student equality and diversity data and the 'traffic light' system is linked to 'identifying and closing the gap'. Together with other qualitative evidence, including regular Student-Staff Liaison Committees - a model initially proposed by the Students' Union and embedded since 2014 – this enables a cycle of continuous improvement and the identification of good practice for dissemination at Module, Programme, Subject, Faculty and University level. While we have institutional oversight of key strategic themes (e.g. NSS, employability/graduate employability, continuation), we ensure that each of these is actioned at the level of the programme through a tightly monitored rolling review process.

The University has **successfully widened access and improved outcomes for students** from disadvantaged backgrounds or who come into higher education with lower entry qualifications. In the five years to 2015-16, full-time student numbers fell by 511 (5.1%) while part-time student numbers fell by 1,115 (24.7%). The overall reduction in students was 1,626 (11.1%), although full-time first degree numbers rose by 667 (8.8%). The reduction in full-time 'other' undergraduates follows a strategic decision to develop our first degree portfolio while reductions in part-time undergraduate students follow a national trend since the fee increases of 2012. The latest HESA Widening Participation Performance Indicators (PIs) for the five years to 2014-15 confirm our success in recruiting from disadvantaged groups to full-time first degree programmes; we have exceeded our benchmarks on all measures. The introduction of four year first degree programmes with a Foundation Level Framework is an example of our positive response to providing a portfolio that meets the needs of students who enter with low entry tariff points.

As a full-time provider with a small part-time portfolio (no more than 2% of first degree students are on part-time programmes; for 'other' undergraduates this proportion is around 57% and largely CPD) our processes also facilitate the transition to part-time study for approximately 5% of our full-time cohort, where this will enable them to continue successfully in higher education. The TEF metrics confirm that **continuation for all our students is positive**.

Teaching Quality
TQ1   Student engagement
The University of Northampton's focus is on delivering outstanding teaching and learning that engages all our students as active partners in their learning.

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Our University **Learning and Teaching (L&T) Plan** is comprehensively aligned to our Strategic Plan, setting institutional, benchmarked targets, which focus on achieving outstanding student outcomes through teaching and learning excellence and innovation. Key strands of the L&T Plan include: the University's Higher Education Academy (HEA) accredited staff development programme – C@N-DO (*Changemaking at Northampton – Development Opportunities*); the *Enhancing Student Success* plan aimed at improving continuation, progression, student attainment and post-study progression; and our *Redesign* agenda - a systematic review of teaching and curriculum and the adoption of active blended learning as the new normal, which aims to raise student engagement and outcomes. The L&T Plan directly aligns to the Employability Action Plan (SO1 and SO2) resulting in the embedding of graduate employability skills alongside opportunities for placements and work shadowing. It also incorporates authentic work-based and work-related activities and assessments (such as problem-solving, simulations and external client briefs) into programme design and delivery, providing a consistent, aligned, student-centred, personalised and adaptable framework both within and in addition to our curricula.

Staff development and intellectual capital are critical to achieving our strategic targets as enhanced staff expertise has a corresponding impact on improved outcomes for students. C@N-DO, identified by the HEA as a 'fresh approach' to CPD, provides extensive, flexible and responsive University-wide staff development across all areas of the UK Professional Standards Framework. This enables staff to plan, manage and structure their ongoing professional development through identifying appropriate workshops from an expanding portfolio (30), which meets their emerging individual needs and are aligned to professional roles (e.g. Programme Leader, Academic Integrity Officer and Personal Academic Tutor). 50% of all teaching staff have actively participated between May 2014 and May 2016, rising to 73% for full-time substantive teaching staff. These workshops provide an inclusive, rich, relevant and interdisciplinary approach to CPD that also involves student and employer input with respect to design and delivery. Digital literacy is embedded in staff development to ensure we develop digitally fluent staff, who are able to contribute to digital futures. This integrated and embedded approach to professional development was commended as an area of Good Practice in our QAA Higher Education Review (HER) (2015/16).

In the two-year period since the launch of C@N-DO, an additional 6 Senior Fellowships, 55 Fellowships and 15 Associate Fellowships have been awarded and the University is on track to deliver its ambitious strategic plan target for 75% substantive staff with recognised teaching qualifications by 2017 (2016 42%). It is indicative of the University's commitment to valuing teaching that Professional Services staff participate in C@N-DO and gain HEA recognition (Professional Services staff have a National Teaching Fellow, 2 Senior Fellows and 14 HEA Fellows). Non-substantive teaching staff are employed primarily to bring currency in relation to industry and professional practice, thereby providing authentic learning experiences within our programmes. Our approach to developing PhD students who deliver some teaching, involves engagement with C@N-DO and support to gain HEA recognition: practice affirmed by QAA in our 2015/16 HER. This demonstrates the University's commitment to high quality teaching and the associated investment in professional development for *all* involved in teaching.

In response to strategic targets, we have adopted a University-wide structured approach to enhancing **student continuation, progression, completion, success and post study progression.** This approach started in 2013 with the Student Success strand of the Learning and Teaching Plan and is now incorporated in our Enhancing Student Success plan, which combines our First Year Experience and Continuing Student Success projects. Alongside these University-wide projects, the adoption of a programme-level perspective, which extends our embedded use of quality dashboards, has resulted in personalised interventions and enhanced outcomes for students with sustained year-on-year improvements in continuation outcomes for all students. These continuation outcomes perform above HE benchmarks as reported in HESA PI results.

The University and Students' Union (SU) have collaborated to identify the opportunities and benefits from a range of **student engagement opportunities**. This Student Engagement Matrix is

a key measure in our Strategic Plan and shows an annual increase in take-up, most notably in *Changemaker* activities and with our Employability Plus scheme. Nearly 4,000 students engaged with Employability Plus in 2015/16 compared with 2,248 in 2014/15. 4,833 students engaged with *Changemaker* activities (35.8% of the student body) and 487 received a *Changemaker* Certificate (compared with 369 in 2014/15). Engagement opportunities are promoted by the SU (through the Programme Representation system), in Faculties and by Professional Service departments.

Since 2014, the SU has produced an **Annual Student Review** to identify strengths and produce recommendations for enhancement in relation to the student experience. The University has formally embedded this in its enhancement processes and staff and students are identified to work on each recommendation. Progress is monitored both at the SU Education Committee and at the University's Student Experience Committee during the year. As examples, our formulation and introduction of a new policy around the use of Lecture Capture occurred in direct response to the Annual Student Review / Student Written Submission 2015, as did the setting, clarification and management of students' expectations around feedback turnaround time. A request to increase wireless network capacity in identified high-traffic areas resulted in a complete overhaul of our Wi-Fi solution and has delivered high performance Wi-Fi capability across the whole institution (both campuses, including Halls of Residence) to reflect the changing needs of the users and the fact that users now possess an average of three Wi-Fi enabled devices.

Students are engaged with debates on the *Redesign* agenda, Waterside development, teaching intensity and teaching contact time. In 2014 and 2015, a series of road-shows were held for students on the new Waterside campus and the learning environment. Working with the SU, the Student Experience Committee approved a set of common definitions on types of teaching and contact time to underpin engaged debate by staff and current and potential students on the University's delivery of active blended learning. Student feedback on redesigned modules is a critical measure of the success of the *Redesign* agenda.

In line with Higher Education Policy Institute student surveys, we have identified 'class-size' as a key dimension for *quality* **teaching and learning**. Action in support of our principle of active blended learning has led to a reduction in broadcast lectures and all modules have a mixed mode of delivery that includes teaching in groups of less than 30 and an individual tutorial entitlement. The University Modular Framework (UMF) - a common framework for the design and delivery of all academic programmes – provides minimum requirements for contact time, ensuring consistency for student entitlement across programmes through our validation and change of approval processes.

Our **systematic approach to responding to student feedback** has resulted in high levels of undergraduate student satisfaction as confirmed in the TEF metrics (average NSS ratings across the past three years: Teaching 87.4%; Assessment & Feedback 76.7%; and Academic Support 83.5%). Satisfaction by the various diversity groups is also very high and gaps between groups are narrow; in some cases there are more positive outcomes for disadvantaged groups, for example students with disabilities in relation to teaching and academic support. Part-time NSS student satisfaction is also high and although it is tracking below the full-time results, the gap is closing as there has been a five year improving part-time trend.

In addition, our internal **undergraduate *module* student evaluation** data dashboard, which is directly aligned to the NSS questions, shows a consistently high level of undergraduate student satisfaction sustained over the three-year period from 2013/14 to 2015/16 with an average satisfaction of 86.3% for 'teaching', 80.7% for 'assessment & feedback' and 83.6% for 'academic support', tracking above the NSS 2016 results for the same questions. There has been a three year rise in the percentage of subject fields that show improvement in relation to these NSS aligned areas (the proportion of subjects performing below the University thresholds has fallen, and the proportion performing above University targets has risen).

TQ2 Valuing teaching

The University of Northampton's culture recognises and rewards excellent teaching and is fully embedded across the University.

Student Experience targets form the largest section of the University's Operational Plan. These drive a coherent, joined-up approach to quality enhancement, including an all-staff Personal Development Review process with line-of-sight from the Vice Chancellor's annual objectives to all members of staff; contributing to the above benchmark performance in the TEF metrics.

The **appointment processes for academic staff** affirms the importance of teaching through person specification criteria and the expectation that candidates, including those at senior level, undertake a teaching activity observed by students as part of the overall interview process. Letters of appointment set out expectations in relation to gaining HEA Fellowship or a HEFCE recognised teaching qualification.

Section TQ1 identifies our C@N-DO staff development scheme as a key facet of our **institutional focus on excellent teaching**. C@N-DO requires all staff applying for Fellowship to engage in peer observation. The University has adopted a developmental and collaborative approach to peer-to-peer observation, underpinned by an approved Code of Practice.

The Students' Union STAR (Student Teaching and Representation) Awards that **recognise and reward excellent teaching** are strongly supported by the University. Excellent teaching practice is made visible through more than 200 nominations for awards, including 'Outstanding Lecturer'. These nominations are highly valued by staff and celebrated at an annual prestigious awards ceremony. Winners are invited to present at our annual Learning and Teaching Conference, sharing good practice and inspiring our audience in the process. The SU's annual STAR report provides evidence of good practice, which is used to inform University approaches to teaching, for example the C@N-DO staff development programme, and ChANGE project (Changemaker Attributes at Northampton for Graduate Employability) (SO2). Shortlisted staff are invited to lead on University policy review and projects.

The L&T plan identifies **specific targets for research and scholarship** and its annual review shows a steady increase in staff publications, conferences and consultancy. The University invests in funding for innovative L&T research projects for both staff (ILT Innovation Bids) and students (URB@N scheme – Undergraduate Research Bursaries @ Northampton) (LE2). We have a competitive and systematic career progression scheme to enable academic staff to become full professors through different pathways. 44% of our Professors were appointed via the Learning and Teaching pathway.

TQ3 Rigour and stretch

The University of Northampton's **approach to programme design** provides scope for outstanding levels of stretch; this ensures that students from different backgrounds are significantly challenged and supported to achieve their full potential. Our students acquire knowledge, understanding and skills that, in the medium to long term, enable them to secure highly skilled employment and make a positive social impact in line with our *Changemaker* values.

The University's **academic regulations** are based on the University Modular Framework (UMF) (TQ2). It provides a robust, fair and transparent means to ensure equity for students across modules in relation to student study time, contact hours, assessment range and load, in order to support student progress and maintain standards. The University's academic regulations and academic policies are developed in line with sector developments and reviewed annually to ensure fitness-for-purpose. The UMF has supported continuation and progression for all students: for example, an average of 74% of students who interrupted their studies were able to successfully return to them.

Over the past three years, as part of our *Redesign* agenda, 60% of modules have been reviewed

and redesigned as fit-for-purpose to deliver **active blended learning**. Staff are well supported in this process through central investment in a team of Learning Designers and Learning Technologists, using our well researched CAIeRO (Creating Aligned Interactive educational Resource Opportunities) methodology. CAIeRO is deployed as a vehicle to support teaching teams to deliver personalised, participative, active blended learning. The involvement of academic and Professional Services staff, students and employers (where appropriate) ensures an integrated approach to curriculum design. In addition to the focus on active blended learning, all redesign work is targeted at delivering the University's priorities for digital transformation, personalisation and graduate employability. The redesigned modules are approved through our robust quality assurance processes, thus completing our planning-approval-delivery-enhancement cycle. Additional impacts from CAIeRO have been the building of effective teaching teams and the development of transferable skills for staff. This institution-wide approach to curriculum development and design was identified as an area of Good Practice by the QAA in our 2015/16 HER.

External Examiner reports provide robust evidence to **confirm academic standards, rigour and fairness, and student performance**; they also inform **quality enhancement**. The External Examiner Report templates require both qualitative and quantitative feedback (where 1 is high/5 is low), enabling trend analysis and action planning. In 2016, 100% of External Examiner Reports agreed with all statements on academic standards, 99% with statements on measuring achievement, rigour and fairness and 98% with statements on comparability of standards and student performance providing very strong external assurance. Ratings have been consistently high in all questions and the overall average rating has further improved from 1.31 to 1.27 across the past three years. 100% of External Examiners agreed that the type of assessments were 'appropriate for student, subject, level and learning outcomes' with an overall rating of 1.21 and 97% agreed that the 'quality and quantity of written feedback to students on their assessed work is consistent and appropriate' with an average rating of 1.45. In those exceptional cases (8/150 reports in 2016) where there are negative comments or ratings an improvement plan is submitted to the University's Academic Quality and Standards Committee. Subsequent External Examiner Reports confirm this as an effective mechanism to drive improvement in assessment practice. Across the past three years, the University has encouraged opportunities for student and External Examiner engagement, as part of its approach to working in partnership with students, ideally face-to-face. Engagement between students and Examiners has increased to 52%, thereby improving the richness of information available to External Examiners to support their contribution to quality enhancement. All University degree outcomes are reviewed annually in line with sector and subject performance. We ensure there is **no grade inflation** and that standards are maintained by affording particular scrutiny to those student outcomes at programme level that appear to be outliers.

TQ4 Assessment and Feedback
The University of Northampton's high quality assessment and feedback processes, provide highly effective challenge and support to enable students from all backgrounds to achieve their full potential.

The TEF metrics confirm that **student satisfaction with assessment and feedback** is very positive and above the sector benchmark. Students have consistently rated NSS 'assessment and feedback' above the HEI average for the last ten years with an average of 76.7% in the last three years. The University ensures that standards are robust and maintained, and that enhancement is delivered for all students, through personalised academic support (LE3), the explicit identification and unitisation of assessment as part of the University Modular Framework; the prioritising of assessment matters within C@N-DO (TQ1); our curriculum (re-)design process - CAIeRO (TQ3) and monitoring and approval processes.

Academic teams are required to analyse **assessment** regularly as part of our continuous review process. Student feedback together with External Examiner Reports and the 'traffic light' quality dashboards (reporting on grades, pass rates, submission rates, return rates) identify where support

and intervention is required for individual students or specific groups. Personalisation is provided via the subject-specific Personal Academic Tutor scheme and the centralised Learning Development team; the latter has seen increased University investment as part of the First Year Experience project (TQ1 and LE3). Academic support is favourably rated by students, with NSS ratings averaging 83.5% across the past three years and performing above HE sector average.

There is **high quality support and professional development for staff** in the key area of assessment and feedback. Assessment is a priority within C@N-DO, where 17% of staff development activities are directly linked to enhancing assessment practice. Our on-line Assessment and Feedback Portal provides pedagogic support for staff in assessment design and practice. As a University, we are systematically re-conceptualising assessment practices, including the introduction of new and creative assessment instruments, reformulation of regulations and the promotion of assessment literacy and assessment (co-)design. We have published 31 case studies of good practice in assessment, thereby helping to embed high quality practices across the University. Our Assessment and Feedback Policy is reviewed annually to ensure that our assessment practice remains fit-for-purpose in a changing pedagogic environment. Revisions are the result of full consultation with staff, student and employers, based on pedagogic need, and supported through standardisation of practice and clear management of student expectations. This provides our students with access to appropriate information to enable them to make individualised, autonomous and informed choices. Our Assessment and Feedback Policy specifically addresses the re-submission process to ensure entitlement to academic support for re-submission and secure opportunities for continuation; at the same time it ensures standards are maintained and prevents grade inflation through grade capping.

Our focus on **graduate employability**, including employability-aligned assessment instruments and placements, has led to increased collaboration between University and work-based staff to design and deliver **effective assessment**, such as electronic portfolios. Student satisfaction with assessment and feedback on work-based learning/placement modules tracks above the average module level satisfaction in that area (85.8%/80.7%).

We support our students to have a good understanding of **academic integrity and misconduct** and, in partnership with the Students' Union, we seek to prevent misconduct from the outset. A mandatory session on student policies - including the interplay between Academic Integrity and Misconduct, and Mitigating Circumstances policies - is part of academic staff induction. We have seen a year-on-year overall reduction in undergraduate academic misconduct referrals and referrals upheld (5.3% to 4.4% referrals and 4.3% to 3.4% referrals upheld).

Since 2012, we have successfully implemented a policy on the **electronic submission of student work for assessment**: Submitting and Grading Electronically (SaGE) underpinned by comprehensive staff development and on-going support. The introduction of this policy positively correlates to TEF NSS metrics on assessment and feedback, which are significantly above benchmark. Our students' satisfaction with on-line assessment is 7% above sector average on the JISC digital tracker survey and 82.5% of our assessments are returned by the published date, monitored via Turnitin[2]; a year-on-year improving performance.

We view high quality assessment as key to a positive performance in continuation and progression as well as attainment. The overall impact of this approach has led to our TEF metric for non-continuation falling from 8.4% to 7.4% over three years for full-time, and from 30.6% to 15.4% for part-time; our percentage of good degrees has risen from 66% to 67.8% over the last three years. The University believes that enabling students to reach their potential and achieve good academic outcomes is also important for post-study progression in an increasingly competitive graduate level employment market.

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[2] Turnitin is used by a majority of HEIs as a document originality checking service and also integrates with Blackboard our VLE platform to provide marking and feedback functionality

Learning Environment
LE1   Resources

The University of Northampton has excellent physical and digital resources that are used actively and consistently by students and support an outstanding learning environment.

We have invested £20 million in our **physical and on-line learning environments** since 2010, including the extension and refurbishment of teaching spaces and a major refurbishment of library spaces around a learning commons ideal. The underpinning philosophy of vibrant, democratic, adaptable and IT rich learning spaces is being modelled and evaluated, both for the benefit of our current students and for the design of the new Waterside campus. The learning commons approach includes team-based teaching in open library spaces, the development of library 'maker spaces' for the Arts and the creation of dispersed social learning spaces. Alongside this, our more traditional, silent study areas have also been increased and redesigned to facilitate scholarly and safe working. Developments have involved, and continue to involve, students in their design and evaluation, including informal research projects to provide an evidence base for pedagogically driven environments. Student Ambassadors are involved in delivering library inductions and modelling effective student academic life.

Investment in the physical environment has been matched by **investment in IT infrastructure** (£3.5 million investment since 2014/15, including the University's virtual learning environment (VLE) known as NILE (Northampton Integrated Learning Environment). A complete review of the software underpinning on-line learning resulted in an enhanced suite of resources, including collaborative tools (Blackboard Collaborate) and multimedia software (Kaltura). The review of VLE modules led to a redesigned template to enhance consistency and direction for students. A 'Rate My VLE' feature encourages students to provide ongoing feedback on the design and content of on-line modules to secure clear and consistent signposting for students in their on-line environment. Learning analytics from Blackboard and Turnitin software are used to monitor and enhance academic systems and practice. There is a close link between internally funded research projects (University L&T Innovation Fund and URB@N projects (with students as co-researchers)) and learning support developments such as our award-winning on-line student-facing Skills Hub (LE3). Within the past three years, the library management system has been replaced (Sierra), a new resource discovery tool consolidating access to physical and online resources installed (NELSON underpinned by Primo), and a dynamic, online reading list software (Aspire) integrated into the VLE.

Since 2014, **Wi-Fi** has been enhanced across the University with extra capacity targeted at high use teaching and learning spaces and improved coverage for social and independent learning space (£225K); teaching room IT improvements (£250K); major PC refresh and upgrade of software (£445K); network improvements (£335K) and a new student portal developed. Significant improvements in the numbers of reported *Student IT Incidents* followed this investment, for example incidents in the highest reporting months of September/October fell by 32%.

Expenditure on **library resources** is in line with the sector mean for new universities and student-led purchasing and unlimited inter-library loans for all students form an integral part of collection development and access to resources. The recent investment of an extra £200K in information resources is linked to dramatic increases in use of library resources, especially online books and journals (with e-book downloads rising by 63% to 1,986,107 and e-journals rising by 19% to 1,039,536 in 2015/16).

Investment in the learning infrastructure has **resulted in significant rises in student satisfaction** measured quantitatively by a 5 year rise in NSS satisfaction with library resources and services from 77% to 85% and qualitatively through the decline in negative comments in surveys about the VLE (falling by 16%) and library environment (falling by 64%) since 2014.

Enhancements are communicated to students through formal staff student forums and via 'You Said, We Did' communications. Improvement plans are produced by Professional Services working with academics and students where programmes have shown a dip in NSS satisfaction,

and these have proved effective in addressing student concerns with significant improvements of more than 10% for individual programmes in the following year. The responsiveness of Professional Services was favourably commented on in the Student Written Submission produced for the 2015/16 QAA HER.

There has been a systematic process of centralisation of the University's Professional Services since 2012 to secure **high quality consistent support for student progress and success**. Investments in student-facing services have included the establishment of new centralised units, including the Institute of Learning and Teaching in 2013, UCEE/Changemaker Hub in 2013 and the Placement and Work-Based Learning Unit in 2014 alongside investment in Learning Development and Learning Technology staffing.

LE2   Scholarship, Research and Professional Practice

The University of Northampton, through its strength in community-based research, social enterprise, the establishment of *Changemaker Challenges* and its scholarly approach to learning and teaching*,* has consistently involved students in opportunities to engage with activities at the forefront of research and practice.

Research-informed teaching is a core expectation of the University's programme approval and review processes, alongside engagement with employers and, where appropriate, professional practice. Programme teams present evidence that students are exposed to current research and professional practice in the subject area. The University Modular Framework requires that students study research methods and undertake an independent project or dissertation informed by subject research methodology or practice for an honours degree.

Our **Professoriate** is expected to make a significant contribution to teaching and there is a thriving culture of students joining staff at subject research seminars. Each Research group identifies how their research will inform teaching and learning in their annual Operational Plan. These plans are approved by the Research and Enterprise Committee.

The University has a **strong applied research focus** through its strengths in areas such as Health and Well-being, Special Educational Needs, Supply Chain and Logistics, and Social Enterprise and Innovation. All programmes with a professional focus have embedded opportunities for students to engage with cutting edge professional practice, working with partners. The University's *Changemaker Challenges* provide opportunities for students to engage with social innovation and enterprise projects with partners, at the forefront of improving social outcomes in Northamptonshire. Students are directly involved in the co-facilitation of C@N-DO CPD workshops for staff (TQ1), module and programme design and redesign through CAIeRO (TQ3) and pedagogic research and policy development (TQ4), which are underpinned by the University's scholarly work in learning and teaching.

Our competitive, annual Learning and Teaching Innovation Fund supports **sustainable, creative, research and evidence-based pedagogic projects**, which are cascaded internally and disseminated externally. There is clear evidence that these projects have informed University policy and practice, for example our approach to module redesign for active blended learning and the Assessment and Feedback policy. We have funded 43 projects over a 4-year period (£370,000). In parallel, 135 students have engaged in our flourishing URB@N scheme; an investment of over £70,000. These structured, supervised (by academic or Professional Service staff) student research projects focus on enhancing learning and teaching and impact directly on students' programmes through the requirement to identify recommendations for improvement. URB@N has had a positive and well-documented impact on individual students: not only does it enhance their research skills but, in some cases, it has led to the student's first refereed co-publication.

A **culture of research and development around teaching and learning** is also encouraged across Professional Services as evidenced by the appointment of a Visiting Professor for Library and Learning Services, a bi-annual Library and Learning Resources research conference and an

impressive publications record (Library and Learning Services 2015/16: 11 papers, 26 conference papers, 10 contributions to professional events and 14 honorary roles). Their research, and the use of extensive professional networks, underpins the development of learning environments.

LE3   Personalised Learning

The University of Northampton's commitment to and delivery of an exceptional personalised learning experience underpins the positive outcomes of all our students and their above benchmark satisfaction with NSS academic support.

The University has a robust and innovative framework of resources and services to **support personalisation** and, in particular, to encourage and support independent study, research and the development of employability skills and *Changemaker* attributes (the latter two are covered in SO1 and SO2). These in turn support students with transition into and through their academic life and onto post-study progression. Resources are delivered on-line and face-to-face, with links deliberately designed across the two modes of delivery.

Our award winning Skills Hub (Credo Digital Award for Information Literacy 2014) provides a constantly reviewed range of materials to support the **development of academic skills** from induction to research. Usage figures for the Skills Hub have increased 36% in the past 2 years to 152,015. The Study Skills for Academic Success MOOC is offered to all new students and constitutes a means to identify needs and personalise support for new entrants prior to starting and during their first term, such as Flying Start workshops provided by Learning Development. Feedback from students evidences a positive impact on academic confidence.

The **VLE**, which underpins the on-line element of our active blended learning and teaching, has been developed to enhance personalisation. The support of the VLE and other quality outputs of the Learning Technology Team resulted in national recognition from the Association of Learning Technology (ALT Learning Technology Team of the Year 2014/15 and an individual Highly Commended award for the development of the VLE guides in the Learning Technologist of the Year competition 2016). The Changemaker portal is an additional on-line platform that supports student engagement with social enterprise and innovation (SO1 and SO2).

On-line resources are complemented by one-to-one support from Professional Services, which work alongside the academic team to provide **integrated academic support**. The Learning Development team offer individualised support through one-to-one tutorials, daily drop-ins and bespoke, embedded teaching sessions on academic skills. They have been heavily involved in the First Year Experience project to improve continuation and progression through understanding and supporting the development of academic skills in first year students. This project led to the investment in two additional Learning Development Tutors, who have worked closely with academic teams to develop academic skills amongst first year students. This has included embedding academic skills within Foundation Framework four year Degrees, which have high levels of participation from BME and socially disadvantaged groups. Take-up of Learning Development by BME students is high (47% take up by BME students compared to 33% of student population; 24% take up by Black or Black British African compared to 15% of student population).

All students have an entitlement to a **Personal Academic Tutor** (PAT) who provides one-to-one and group tutorial support. There is a PAT area on the ILT web-site, which includes guiding principles for Personal Academic Tutoring, a physical and online publication on 'being a successful PAT' and videos of good practice from staff undertaking this role, including a student appreciation of the role and its value. In addition to offering a centralised set of resources for PATs, the web area also provides a signposting facility to other sources of support for students. 'Supporting Student Success' PAT development is also part of C@N-DO. Our annual PAT survey of staff and students provides an overview of the value of the system, identifying areas for development and enhancement.

Academic Librarians offer similar levels of support to enhance **information and digital literacies**, alongside 24/7 opening of the main university library. Student numbers engaging with Learning Development (6,058 in 2015/16) and our Academic Librarians (10,652 in 2015/16) across workshops, drop-ins and one-to-one tutorials illustrate the importance of this resource to student learning. The University also employs academic advice managers who operate centrally and provide support to individual students in complex situations, looking at their individual cases and considering ways to maximise retention within the boundaries of the University's academic regulations and modular framework. Individualised support for employability is a key feature of the UCEE/Changemaker Hub work (SO1 and SO2).

These systematic University-wide approaches have impacted positively on **outcomes for all students**. In-year withdrawal figures (the percentage of starters not to gain an award or still be enrolled at the first of June) have remained consistently low (2.2% for undergraduates in 2015-16) with a small improving trend across the last three years. In-year withdrawal by diversity group is all below 3%, with no equality differences greater than 1.2 percentage points.

Student Outcomes
SO1   Employment and Further Study
The University of Northampton achieves outstanding outcomes for all students in relation to employment and further study in the context of the local and regional opportunities for graduate level employment.

Maintaining high levels of **employability**, including graduate level employment, is a priority in the University Strategic plan with targets integrated into our Access Agreement and OFFA action plans. We have invested £5M over the last 3 years in creating the UCEE/Changemaker Hub and have integrated employer engagement, employability and *Changemaker* across the University, as well as redesigning the provision of graduate employability support for all WP groups. We have improved accessibility, integrated academic and extracurricular activities, increased work experience opportunities, and addressed underperformance through sharing best practice and investment.

Our institutional **Employability Action Plan** is overseen by the Inclusive Student Experience Group (ISEG) and Student Experience Committee (SEC), ensuring progress is made for all students. A DLHE quality dashboard provides employability data at programme and subject level so that plans can be developed to address any emerging differentials and adverse trends at an early stage. The TEF metrics on employability confirms the sustained success of this approach for students of all backgrounds, notably with performance above UK benchmark for BME and students with disabilities, and for full and part-time modes of delivery. 92% of our undergraduate programmes (with 10 or more respondents) have at least 90% of graduates in work or further study. Employability is a consistently high performing area of the University over the past five years for all students. The QAA identified our institution wide approach to employability as Good Practice: '*well coordinated and extensive and demonstrates substantial engagement with employers. Staff show a high level of commitment to the University's strategy for employability and that students that have engaged in employability related activities report positive experiences'* (QAA HER 2015/16).

The *Longitudinal Educational Outcomes* **data** (December 2016), shows that the proportion of the University's graduates in further study or 'sustained employment' as shown by tax records stands well in comparison to the national average. The employment outcomes for the University's graduates are also seen to improve with time. The percentage in sustained employment and/or further study five years after graduation is consistently high (University average 81.6%/76% national) so that the University of Northampton stands in the upper quartile of English HEIs.

DLHE shows that, in line with its subject profile, the University has a larger proportion of its graduates employed in SOC6 and a lower proportion in SOC2 and SOC3, than is the case nationally. However, the University's proportion of graduates in SOC1 is above UK average. In

'Education for the Training of Teachers (X1)' we perform better than the national average with 97.4% in professional employment (UK 95.8%). The percentage of our graduates earning over £25,000 and £40,000 has increased over the last three years by 4.5 and 3.8 percentage points respectively. Only 5% of our first degree graduates report being unemployed (UK 6%) and 69.9% are in permanent contracts (UK 61. 8%). Other positive quality employability outcomes include less reliance on zero hours contracts 1.7% (UK 2.5%), unpaid internships 1.2% (UK 2.3%), voluntary work 0.7% (UK 1.1%), and short term fixed term contracts 5.7% (UK 7.4%).

Graduate level employment has improved year-on-year for four of the last five years but remains a critical focus for improvement where strategic investment and redesign is prioritised in our overall employability plan. Personalised support is provided through an initial student self-assessment leading to an individual employability action plan, which underpins their employability journey and recognises their aspirations and personal circumstances. Completing the individual employability plan contributes to the achievement of our Employability Plus award; recognising the student's co-curricular achievements. Employability Plus is underpinned by our graduate attributes (SO2). We ensure that all students have full access to the Employability service through the Changemaker Hub portal, which was designed in collaboration with students utilising the CAIeRO process (TQ3).

Graduate employability data suggests that the **challenge for highly skilled employment** is compounded by the number of our graduates who remain in Northamptonshire, linked with comparatively fewer graduate employment opportunities within the area (see TEF Contextual Maps). The social profile of our student population means that, in the short term, many graduates are not able to move away from the local region and so do not access graduate roles initially. Our approach is to provide post-study support for our graduates to ensure that they achieve highly skilled employment in the medium to long term through the provision of a full employability and careers service for three years after they graduate.

A critical strand of the University's employability plan involves **supporting the development of graduate employment opportunities, locally and in the region**. This is in the context of a local economy in which the vast majority of companies are small SMEs, with more than three quarters of the county's 23,500 enterprises employing fewer than five people, while only 95 employers have more than 250 employees (0.4%). The University has therefore identified '*Making Northamptonshire the best county in the UK to start, build and run a business'* as one of its *Changemaker Challenge* social impact goals.

Working with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), our **employer engagement priority** is to build a market for our students by overcoming the barriers that employers perceive and ensuring graduate skills match to business needs. Through the LEP, we formed the *Northamptonshire Growth Hub,* attracting ERDF and ESF[3] funding to improve the competitiveness and innovation in the local SME economy. *Ready2Grow* and *Innovate Northants* connect 120 SME businesses with graduates (who have relevant skills and expertise) through internships, placements, consultancy projects and paid work. We work with over 1,681 local and national employers, schools, NHS, and local authorities providing graduate level opportunities for our students.

We have also made significant investment (£200K additional staff costs) in the establishment of a centralised **Placement and Work-based Learning Unit,** in 2014, to support graduate-level work-based learning and placements within programmes, including mentor training, quality monitoring processes and electronic portfolios for assessment. The work of this unit builds directly on the expertise developed on our Initial Teacher Training programmes, which have been consistently judged 'Good' by Ofsted.

The DLHE survey reports 0.7% of our graduates **starting a business** (0.6% UK) and 3.7% **working freelance or self-employed** (5% UK). 67% of our students say we prepared them well/ very well in response to the question 'How well did your overall experience of higher education

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[3] European Regional Development Fund and European Social Fund

prepare you for being self-employed / freelance or starting up your own business?' We have developed a comprehensive framework to support self-employment as a career option. Self-employment is promoted across much of the curriculum, including areas that traditionally have fewer opportunities for graduate level employment, such as social and community development, and the arts. Extracurricular business start-up programmes, 'Dragon's Den' and grants schemes are provided to enhance curriculum provision. Regular networking events with new start business owners, alumni entrepreneurs, and external business networks inspire students to think about the opportunities. Our Enterprise Club offers support to all students and graduates whether they want to start a commercial business or a social venture: providing mentoring, coaching, and business start-up support, funding, and access to networking events, support in approaching banks, and access to the Growth Hub. In addition, we offer support through our business hatchery facility and our incubation programme provided through our innovation centres (Portfolio, ICON, and the Northampton Innovation Centre). The integration of our enterprise offer with the Students' Union enables the widest possible access for students and enables a coordinated support provision that targets support where it is most needed.

The University's approach to securing graduate level employment for our students is a positive feature of our provision however, for many of our graduates who remain in the short term living in Northamptonshire, this will be a medium or long term outcome, achieved with the on-going support of the University.

S02   Employability and Transferable Skills

The University of Northampton's processes and engagement with employers ensure all students acquire knowledge, skills and understanding that are highly valued by employers and demonstrate the University's *Changemaker* mission.

Our University Employability Action Plan is designed to develop the **industry skills and graduate employability attributes** employers want. Employers are involved in programme design, approval and delivery, where appropriate, and there are year-on-year increases in the provision of internships and temporary work opportunities. Academic staff are supported through *C@N-DO CPD* workshops, which support the integration of employability into all programmes. *Rolling Employability Partnership Agreements (REPAs)* are in place across all Faculties, agreeing priorities for careers and employability support and targeting differential employability outcomes by programme. Reviewed at Faculty Executive level, REPAs operationalise the Employability Action Plan and targets work readiness support, self-employment readiness, volunteer readiness, job searching and employer networking activities.

Investment in the centralised UCEE/Changemaker Hub and in the Placement and Work-based Learning Unit, the development of a University Placement and Work-based Learning Policy, and University targets and associated actions, have resulted in improvements in the **provision of in-programme placements and work-based learning** to complement the extensive co-curricular opportunities. Increasing opportunities for in-programme placements is a strategic target and has led to a 6% improvement with 53% of single honours programmes including a work experience placement embedded within the award. Student satisfaction on placement surveys is very high, exceeding 90% across Overall Satisfaction, Teaching and Support; and 85% for Assessment and Feedback.

Our **ChANGE (Changemaker Attributes at Northampton for Graduate Employability)** programme, has been developed through extensive consultation with students, employers (231), and staff to embed *Changemaker* and Graduate Employability across all our programmes extending the current graduate skills learning outcomes to include graduates' digital capabilities, *Changemaker* attributes and graduate employability skills, the better to equip them for work in a changing 21st century working environment. This also underpins the Employability Plus award.

Alongside the student employability development embedded at programme-level, we offer a **comprehensive co-curricular employability offer**. We make available graduate recruitment

opportunities within Unitemps[4] and in 2015/16, 773 students undertook a temporary graduate level role, of which 23% were made permanent. We have grown our **Graduate internship** programme from 5 supported graduate places in 2014/15 to 75 in 15/16, and will have 200 funded graduate internships in 2016/17. 67% of internships in 15/16 led to a student converting to a graduate job within the same firm. Our **overseas summer internship programme**, Balloon Kenya/Ashoka exchange, has grown from 5 students to 45 (14/15 to 15/16) with 100 funded places available in 16/17. This programme is developing into an international student exchange and internship programme with universities that are part of the Ashoka *Changemaker* campus network in Africa, South East Asia and North America. The Growth Hub has obtained EU funding to offer graduate placements and internships to SMEs, and graduate pathways have been developed with RS Components and Coca Cola. Additionally, we have developed *Grow our own Graduate pathways* within the Northamptonshire Growth Hub as a way of providing graduate placements, internships, and jobs: for example, the *Northampton Podiatry unit* integrates concepts of study practice with self-employment and new graduate employment opportunities. We have strategic partnerships with local voluntary sector infrastructure bodies, the local Health and Wellbeing Board and the Chamber of Commerce, all of which provide increased access for our students to graduate placements, internships and jobs, and curriculum enhancements. Further partnerships are with *Goodwill Solutions* (a social enterprise providing rehabilitation for offenders), *Raptor Consulting* providing real consultancy projects to students and graduates at commercial rates that both enhance their CV and provide real industry experience, and *NNBC,* a community radio station delivered by the University and local community.

These ventures are aligned to programmes providing targeted subject specific work experience and are an opportunity to develop transferable skills in a real and safe work environment.

SO3 Positive outcomes for all
The University of Northampton's mission is to *Transform Lives + Inspire Change* and there is strong evidence that all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, achieve positive outcomes.

All University quality reports contain a detailed breakdown of performance by **student diversity characteristics,** benchmarked to external data where available, and our 'traffic light' system is used to signal emerging gaps between equality groups for action. Institutional targets in relation to all student outcome measures, explicitly address the principle of 'identifying and closing the gap' between performances by student group. The Inclusive Student Experience Group formally oversees our Access Agreement, OFFA action plans and the Equality Action Plan to ensure any significant gaps in performance are identified and prioritised for action. The Student Experience Committee captures this in its Annual Action Plan to ensure there is an integrated approach to achieving positive outcomes for all students in relation to all key quality measures, through planned action and monitoring at all levels of the institution.

The TEF metrics for **Student Satisfaction** show that the University is above benchmark for **assessment and feedback, and academic support** with positive, above benchmark, results for both age groups and both White and BME students. Our internal NSS data for part-time shows a comparable picture for part-time satisfaction; tracking slightly below full-time rates (between 2% and 6%). Differences in NSS satisfaction rates between diversity characteristics have fallen for the majority of groups and none of our TEF metrics differs by more than 4 percentage points.

Similarly, the TEF metrics for **continuation** show that the University has a positive, above benchmark, outcome in two out of the last three years for full-time students. Outcomes for part-time and for many diversity groups, including BME, disabled, men and mature students are similarly positive. HESA PI data show that the non-continuation rate for full-time first degree entrants has fallen by 4.2 percentage points (2.0 percentage points for part-time entrants) over the

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[4] Unitemps is a recruitment agency specialising in fulfilling temporary job vacancies, student jobs and internships nationwide.

last five years and is now consistently better than the benchmark. Internal in-year withdrawal rates are very low for all groups, including those from 0-20% IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation). In-year withdrawal rate differences by student characteristics do not exceed 3%, with BME students having lower in-year withdrawal rates than White students.

Employability is another area of sustained high performance for the University, which stands above its TEF benchmark overall, and for both age groups, both White and BME, and students with and without disabilities. Though the TEF metric for highly skilled employment is below the sector benchmark, the University has presented a robust case (SO1) that shows an improvement in highly skilled employment outcomes alongside investment and post-study support to enhance opportunities for those graduates who cannot seek employment outside of Northamptonshire and enable them to achieve this goal in the longer term.

Internal measures of **progression** have been analysed by diversity characteristics since 2011-12 and we have seen general consistency over this period with no groups differing from the average by more than 6 percentage points.

Since 2011-12, the proportions of **good degrees** have positively increased for both full-time and part-time students with a 4.1 percentage point increase overall to 67.8% and the percentage of 'other undergraduates' awarded Merits and Distinctions has grown by 6 percentage points to 58.7% over the last three years. The proportions of good degrees awarded to the different groups has begun to converge across that period and the latest figures show no groups differing from the average by more than 9 percentage points. Given that the overall entry qualifications profile has fallen, this represents a positive **'value-added'** position and this is particularly pleasing, given the lower entry level qualifications for some groups, for example males and BME students. There has also been a rise in overall pass rates for BME students across a five year period (9 percentage points). Targeted support and intervention for individual students, based on the tracking of assessment outcomes regularly within each term, is core to the University's approach to improving outcomes for all (LE3). Our current exploration of approaches to 'learning gain' and 'grade point average' is based on tracking performance at the level of the module grade achievement year-on-year in relation to entry tariff points.

Concluding Statement by the Students' Union

The University of Northampton Students' Union has worked collaboratively and in partnership with the University in the production of this document, through membership of the TEF Steering Group and Senate Committees and the involvement of the SU Education Committee. This follows a number of years of constructive work in developing student engagement opportunities with the University and on-going involvement in its underlying processes.

Since 2014, the Students' Union has produced an annual review identifying strengths, areas for improvement and specific recommendations for enhancement across the institution in relation to the student experience. We are encouraged that this has been embedded formally and is a driver for change at a senior level through the University's Student Experience Committee. This review has consistently identified areas of infrastructure as a priority for investment and over the past two years, the University has responded with a comprehensive programme of works which has included improved coverage for social and independent learning space, teaching room IT and network improvements. These programmes of investment have had a significant impact on the student experience with the number of 'Student IT Incidents' reports falling and increases in NSS satisfaction with library resources and services.

Graduate level employment has improved in four of the last five years and the University has ensured all students acquire the knowledge, skills and understanding that are highly valued by employers through the curriculum, UCEE/Changemaker Hub and Placement and Work-based Learning Unit in addition to extra-curricular activities and volunteer opportunities made available through the Students' Union; underpinned by outstanding support in the ability to articulate skill development and professional experience at interview.