# UNIVERSITY OF EXETER

# Education Strategy

# 2019-2025

# Introduction

The University of Exeter is a learning community of the most talented and creative minds, committed to challenging ambitious and inquisitive learners to become global citizens and agents of change. We are committed to delivering education and student experience of the highest international quality, and to supporting all of our students to realise their potential.

As we enter the third decade of the 21st Century, we are launching this new Education Strategy at a moment of great opportunity to refresh our focus on transforming the lives of all our students, preparing them for challenges that they will face throughout their lives, and on enabling our staff to excel and build our reputation for educational leadership.

This Strategy has been developed through an extensive consultation throughout the 2018/19 academic year involving, as leaders and contributors, academic and professional services staff and students from across the University. It aims to:

- Establish a shared vision for Education at Exeter, based on our identity as a Learning Community within an Education-Research Ecosystem

- Define the Characteristics of Excellence that describe our values relating to Education

- Identify priority areas for enhancement and change for the forthcoming period, building on our strengths and responding to contextual drivers. These are:

   A. To Enhance our Undergraduate Offer in: the Quality of Learning, Teaching, Student Support and Student Outcomes; and in International Attractiveness

   B. To Create an Internationally-Recognised, Market-Led Postgraduate Taught Portfolio

   C. To Support and Enable Our People

   D. To Capitalise on Digital Transformation

   E. To Articulate a Distinctive Model for Education at Exeter

# Who we are: an International Learning Community within an Education-Research Ecosystem

This Strategy builds from a position of strength within the University, characterised by:

- a longstanding reputation for excellent teaching and learning in a research-intensive environment

- a community of inspirational educators and talented, engaged students

- strong partnerships with both our students' unions and with our students

- continuing commitment to innovation.

As a research-intensive University with a reputation for internationally-excellent education and student satisfaction, the synergy between our ambitions in education, research and global engagement is central to our strategies. This Education Strategy is therefore founded on the idea that students and staff all learn through both education and research and, therefore, as a University, we are an International Learning Community within an Education-Research Ecosystem (Figure 1) on which the long-term sustainability of our University is founded. Our focus on both education and research has its origin in our institutional 'Charter of Incorporation'.
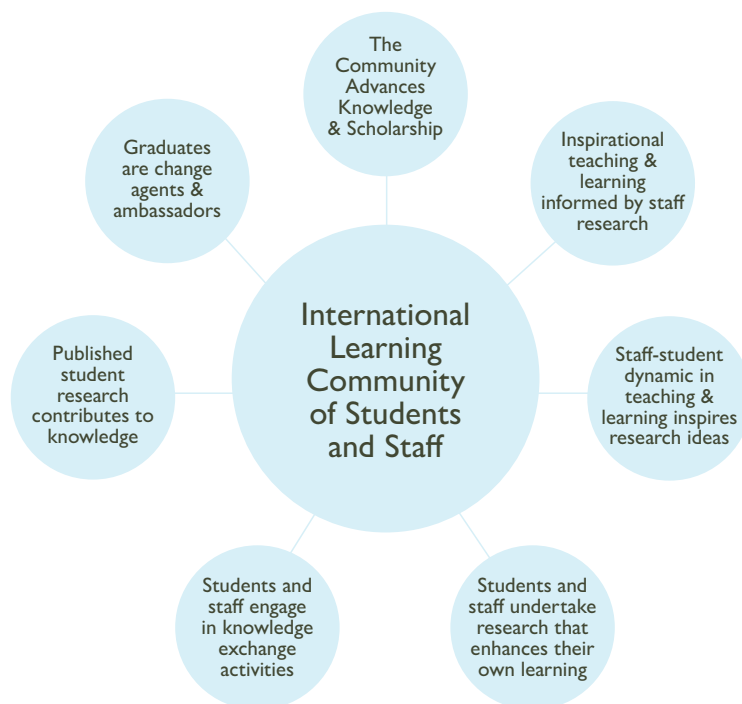
**Figure 1:** An International Learning Community of Students and Staff within an Education-Research Ecosystem

We will build on our strong partnerships between staff and students, and evolve our established ethos of Students as Change Agents. We aim to be known globally for empowering our students, by involving them in the core mission of the University to change the world and contribute to society through the creation, dissemination and application of new knowledge. We will celebrate inquiry-led learning in which students are equal members of the learning community, learning *about* research, and learning *through* their own research, inquiries and discoveries. This will be supported by involving our partners – businesses, universities, public and third-sector organisations, schools and colleges – in co-creating and delivering education. We believe that by doing this, we will develop our students as agents of change both *within* the University, as co-creators of Knowledge, Societal Engagement, Impact Generation, Industrial Engagement, and *beyond*, as Global 21st Century Citizens.
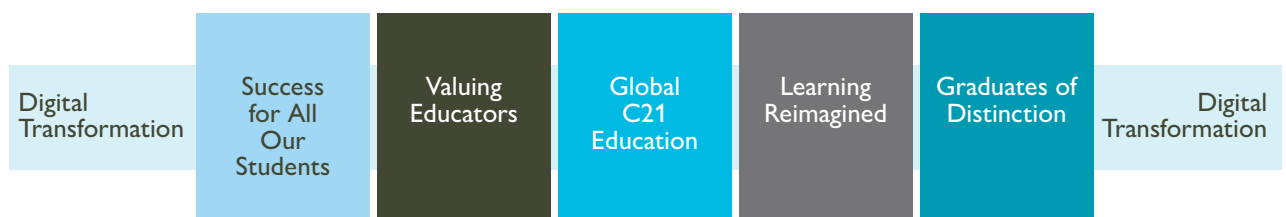
# Our Values: Characteristics of Excellence

We have co-created this strategy using the following thematic framework, focused on our aspirations for education in terms of: students; staff; curriculum; pedagogy; graduates and stakeholders; and the potential for digital transformation to support learning, teaching and the student experience.

| Digital Transformation | Success for All Our Students | Valuing Educators | Global C21 Education | Learning Reimagined | Graduates of Distinction | Digital Transformation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**Figure 2:** The Focus Themes addressed in the consultation on the Education Strategy Green Paper

The Strategy commits to the following Characteristics of Excellence in relation to education, to which we aspire and that combine to provide a shared vision for education at Exeter.

## Success for All Our Students

> Ours will be a diverse, culturally rich and engaged community in which we welcome learners of potential of every background.

> We will promote inclusivity, wellbeing and accessibility through our curriculum, policies and processes.

> We will support all students to fulfil their potential and make a positive contribution to the wider world.

> We will strive to eliminate gaps in access, attainment and progression to employment seen between groups defined by socioeconomic (dis)advantage, ethnicity, age, disability, gender and nationality.

## Valuing Educators

> We will create an inspiring and co-operative learning community for both staff and students in which education and research are synergistic and equally valued.

> We will recognise, develop and reward excellent educators across the University, at all career stages, through shaping our structures, policies and resources to achieve this.

> We will create an environment that fosters evidence-based innovation in educational practice, thus building both individuals' and the institution's reputation for pedagogic leadership.

# Global 21st Century Education

> In partnership with our students we will forge a globally competitive curriculum and educational experience which addresses the challenges of the future.

> Our high-quality, interdisciplinary, research-rich and flexible education will attract students from around the world and engage them as active learners, and we will recognise diversification as a process to which everyone in our community contributes and from which everyone benefits.

> Our approach to education will reflect critically on the meanings of the 'Global' and Exeter's place within this; it will make meaningful global opportunities open to all and will enable open engagement with other perspectives, ideas and challenges.

> Our physical and virtual learning spaces will be well designed and maintained, accessible to all, and conducive to the delivery of world-class education.

# Learning Reimagined

> We will ensure that learning is enhanced through pedagogies informed by research and best practice, and is refreshed through continual evidence-based experimentation and evaluation. Innovative teaching, learning and assessment will be designed rigorously, so that aims, methods, content and outcomes are clearly aligned and carefully evaluated by teachers and learners.

> Through hands-on learning experiences, we will engage students as active participants in the production of knowledge, whether that knowledge is simply new to them or an original contribution to the relevant field of inquiry.

> Our assessment will be: fair, appropriate, quality assured and relevant; rigorous and challenging; evidence-based in its authenticity and originality; collaborative and diverse, and inclusive and accessible.

> We will continually review what we do in light of student feedback and advances across the sector to ensure that the Exeter experience is at the forefront of higher education.

# Graduates of Distinction

> The Exeter graduate will be a pro-active, inclusive, resilient and creative agent of change. We will prepare our graduates for life beyond graduation through development of curiosity, openness, creativity, critical thinking and global understanding.

> The University of Exeter experience will offer diverse opportunities within and beyond the curriculum, to tailor experiences to develop wellbeing, employability and a lifelong approach to learning and development.

> Employers, alumni and other stakeholders will be engaged in the development and delivery of our programmes to embed diverse 'real-world', external perspectives that support students to become agents of change.

# Our Strategic Priorities

The priorities in Education at Exeter for the next 5 years build on this vision of excellence and on our substantial existing strengths; they must also respond to our context and external drivers. They are defined in the context of key challenges facing the world as defined in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The priorities also respond to the skills required by the re-imagining of work resulting from digital technologies, automation and artificial intelligence, predicted to require increasing levels of higher level cognitive, and social and emotional skills . Our priorities also recognise the opportunities and challenges presented by the UK and global Higher Education environment.

Addressing the priorities identified will enable us to build a more diverse and sustainable institution. We will enhance our international reputation in alignment to our Global Strategy, and through explicit recognition of our Education-Research Ecosystem and the place within it of our learning community of students and staff, we will capitalise on synergies between research and education and ensure alignment between our Education and Research Strategies.

This Strategy identifies five priority areas that both build on the Characteristics of Excellence and enable us to respond to the opportunities and challenges of our environment:

**A. To Enhance our Undergraduate Offer in: the Quality of Learning, Teaching, Student Support and Student Outcomes; and in International Attractiveness** -  with a focus on the development of cohesive, diverse learning communities, support for transitions, and engagement in research-inspired, inquiry-led learning and global opportunities.

**B. To Create an Internationally-Recognised, Market-Led Postgraduate Taught Portfolio** - to capitalise on new opportunities that align with our internationally-recognised strengths and with a focus on enhancing international career prospects for programme graduates.

**C. To Support and Enable Our People** through facilitation and celebration of excellence and innovation, enhancing career progression and leadership opportunities for educators.

**D. To Capitalise on Digital Transformatio**n to improve teaching and learning experience for students and educators, reaching new groups of students and freeing time to be spent on what we value.

**E. To Articulate a Distinctive Model for Education at Exeter** that allows us to achieve more than a series of incremental enhancements.

¹ MGI: Skill Shift – Automation and the Future of the Workplace.

See also 'The 3 key skill sets for the workers of 2030' (World Economic Forum) and 'What are the top 10 soft skills for the future of work' (Forbes).

**Priority A.**

## To Enhance our Undergraduate Offer in: the Quality of Learning, Teaching, Student Support and Student Outcomes; and in International Attractiveness

Our undergraduate offer has been a key strength of the University and our programmes remain highly attractive to talented students. We seek to enhance our provision in the following ways:

| OBJECTIVE | PRIMARY CHARACTERISTICS OF EXCELLENCE ADDRESSED | ACTIVITY AND RATIONALE |
|---|---|---|
| 1) Inducting and integrating students into Learning Communities within the Education-Research Ecosystem from day 1 | Success for All Our Students<br><br>Global 21st Century Education | a) Explicitly focusing on development of learning community within departments and programmes, including roles & responsibilities (e.g. giving and receiving feedback);<br><br>b) Encouraging and enabling student engagement from day 1, informed by the need to maximise inclusion and minimise the risk of isolation;<br><br>c) Creating intellectual challenge and excitement through early engagement with departmental research, central disciplinary debates and grand challenges (as appropriate). |
| 2) Attracting & Supporting Diverse Learners, and ensuring that the content and delivery of education supports inclusion, diversity and wellbeing | Success for All Our Students<br><br>Global 21st Century Education | a) Increasing recruitment of disadvantaged, BAME and other under-represented students through the delivery of an ambitious Access & Participation Plan;<br><br>b) Attraction to diverse international students;<br><br>c) Supporting transition and inclusive pedagogy, aligned to Provost Commission work and informed by research projects including Transforming Transitions;<br><br>d Using evidence, best practice and expert guidance to embed Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the curriculum;<br><br>e) Supporting a whole institution approach to mental health and wellbeing, aligned to the Step Change Framework. |
| 3) Offering meaningful global opportunities to all (embedding global study and work experience) | Global 21st Century Education<br><br>Graduates of Distinction<br><br>Success for All Our Students | a) Increasing international opportunities through delivery of the Global Strategy – in particular a diverse range of opportunities that are part of the formal and informal curriculum;<br><br>b) Increasing work experience opportunities for International & Home students;<br><br>c) Working with Global Partnerships to develop lasting educational partnerships with international peers including from the global south;<br><br>d) Collaborating with international partners in the co-production, design and delivery of a global curriculum (including joint field trips and virtually- or digitally-enabled collaboration). |
| 4) Increasing Active/Inquiry-led Learning | Learning Reimagined<br><br>Success for All Our Students<br><br>Valuing Educators | a) Optimisation of formal learning opportunities to emphasise interactive, dialogic, inquiry-led learning;<br><br>b) Increased use of digital platforms for content delivery to enabled flipped classrooms and studio learning approaches. |
| 5) Rebalancing Assessment | Learning Reimagined<br><br>Graduates of Distinction<br><br>Valuing Educators<br><br>Success for All Our Students | a) Reducing replication and redundancy in summative assessment;<br><br>b) Increasing personalisation of assessment (e.g. longitudinal portfolios);<br><br>c) Increasing rapid feedback and self-evaluation in formative learning;<br><br>d) Increasing competency-based assessment to complement summative assessment. |
| 6) Liaising with key stakeholders | Graduates of Distinction<br><br>Success for All Our Students | a) Collaborating with business, industrial and NGO partners, in programme design and delivery (e.g. degree apprenticeships, student projects, employability skills working with employers);<br><br>b) Collaborating with schools, colleges, charities and other HE Institutions in raising awareness, aspirations and attainment. |

**Priority B.**

# To Create an International-Recognised, Market-Led Postgraduate Taught Portfolio

We will strengthen and broaden our postgraduate portfolio, in alignment with our internationally-recognised strengths, and substantially increase our attractiveness to postgraduate applicants from around the world by ensuring that programmes enhance international career prospects for programme graduates.

| OBJECTIVE | PRIMARY CHARACTERISTICS OF EXCELLENCE ADDRESSED | ACTIVITY AND RATIONALE |
|---|---|---|
| 1) Aligning programmes to employers' needs and areas where we have credible international strength | Graduates of Distinction<br><br>Global 21st Century Education | a) Undertaking market research to identify employers' needs, mapping to our areas of strength and directing programme design to focus on those needs. |
| 2) Embedding flexibility and choice into programme design to enable personalisation of students' experience | Learning Reimagined<br><br>Success for All Our Students<br><br>Graduates of Distinction | a) Building on the recognition that postgraduate students have increasingly focused requirements in relation to further study and intended outcomes;<br><br>b) Facilitating cross-college coordination to enable programme building blocks and streams to be used across multiple programmes. |
| 3) Designing programmes to meet the needs of prospective students wherever they are and however they wish to learn | Success for All Our Students<br><br>Graduates of Distinction<br><br>Learning Reimagined | a) Building on the recognition that students progressing directly from undergraduate study represent only a small proportion of prospective postgraduate students;<br><br>b) Designing programmes from start to finish that can use many of the same resources for delivery on-campus, online and in blended form;<br><br>c) Being flexible in meeting changing capacity of in-work learners to engage with programmes and design 'bitesized', unbundled models such as 'micro-masters' that enable non-linear progress and episodic engagement. |
| 4) Ensuring that programme design, content and delivery support inclusion, diversity and wellbeing | Success for All Our Students<br><br>Valuing Educators<br><br>Graduates of Distinction<br><br>Global 21st Century Education | a) As under priority A, but recognising particular needs of postgraduate students, especially where they are engaged through a variety of delivery methods including online. |
| 5) Collaborating with key business and industry partners to develop bespoke offerings at scale | Graduates of Distinction | a) Taking an agile approach to co-creating programmes with key corporate partners with needs to invest in staff development, extending the Degree Apprenticeship model internationally. |
| 6) Proactively engaging our alumni as lifelong learners to meet their continuing and evolving career needs | Graduates of Distinction<br><br>Global 21st Century Education | a) Responding to the commitment to Exeter of our alumni, and their trust in the quality of our Education;<br><br>b) Maintaining alumni as lifelong members of our learning community who look to Exeter to meet their career progressions, education, training and support needs. |
| 7) Enhancing our programme development capacity | Learning Reimagined<br><br>Valuing Educators | a) Investing in developing skill and capacity in programme development, both in academic and professional service roles;<br><br>b) Developing sector-leading marketing of our portfolio and recruitment to it. |

**Priority C.**

# To Support and Enable Our People

The University's community of educators and professional staff is vital to the successful delivery of these strategic priorities. Therefore, it is imperative that, just as our students are supported to fulfil their potential through our commitment to the characteristics of excellence and to continuous enhancement of our programmes, our academic and professional staff and postgraduate research students are fully supported to achieve their potential.

| OBJECTIVE | PRIMARY CHARACTERISTICS OF EXCELLENCE ADDRESSED | ACTIVITY AND RATIONALE |
|---|---|---|
| 1) Co-creating innovative education | Valuing Educators<br><br>Learning Reimagined | a) Expanding and developing the Education Incubator as a catalyst for innovation and networking, creating fellows from across our international learning community;<br><br>b) Focusing investment in exploration of the potential applications for enhancement offered by new technologies including Virtual and Augmented Reality (in conjunction with EdTech Exeter);<br><br>c) Strengthening ties between Education Support teams (e.g. Academic Development and Technology Enhanced Learning) and Colleges. |
| 2) Facilitating mobility and networking in support of innovation and reputation-building | Valuing Educators | a) Enhancing and promoting inward and outward mobility schemes as powerful vehicles to enable our staff to witness cutting edge pedagogy in practice;<br><br>b) Sharing best practice including through events, building on the annual Exeter Education Conference. |
| 3) Enhancing support and training | Valuing Educators | a) Developing training and support resources for staff that are flexible, accessible anytime and anywhere, targeted to career need and have the potential for personalisation;<br><br>b) Continually reviewing and enhancing provision through the Exeter Academic, in light of the Education Strategy. |
| 4) Ensuring opportunities for career progression and fostering educational leadership | Valuing Educators | a) Enabling staff to achieve career progression through contribution to advancing the Education Strategy;<br><br>b) Ensuring alignment between Education, Research and Impact, Global and People strategies to promote parity of esteem;<br><br>c) Establishing programmes to identify, support and develop future Education leaders, and ensure Education Leadership roles are attractive and well-rewarded;<br><br>d) Recognising and rewarding the role of postgraduate students and Professional Services staff as educators. |
| 5) Celebrating and enhancing the diversity among our staff, and supporting inclusion and wellbeing | Valuing Educators | a) Recognising and addressing differential experiences among educators;<br><br>b) Aligning with the Provost Commission, People Strategy, Employee Engagement Survey and other workstreams to support inclusion, diversity and wellbeing. |

**Priority D.**

# To Capitalise on Digital Transformation

Where digital transformation can enhance learning and teaching, enable us to reach new learners, increase efficacy and efficiency, or free us to spend more time on what we most value in learning and teaching, we will seize the opportunities that exist. We will innovate to do so and we will seek to be in the vanguard of imaginative enhancement through digital transformation; however, our approach will not be dictated by technology. Work to support this priority is already underway through the EdTech Exeter Programme.

| OBJECTIVE | PRIMARY CHARACTERISTICS OF EXCELLENCE ADDRESSED | ACTIVITY AND RATIONALE |
|---|---|---|
| 1) Taking an evidence-led approach to seizing opportunities offered by digital transformation | Success for All Our Students<br><br>Valuing Educators<br><br>Learning Reimagined | a) Horizon scanning and engaging with external practitioners and providers to ensure that we are aware of new opportunities and innovation;<br><br>b) Piloting and evaluating technologies and innovations through the Education Incubator and EdTech Exeter programme to identify potential for further implementation. |
| 2) Supporting educators to build digital skills in teaching and learning | Valuing Educators<br><br>Learning Reimagined | a) Supporting research into pedagogy and development of the Education-Research Ecosystem through the Education Incubator;<br><br>b) Supporting educators to develop digital skills to use the range of tools available to innovate teaching practice and enhance student experience. |
| 3) Improving processes and systems to create greater efficiency and transparency | Valuing Educators<br><br>Learning Reimagined | a) Focusing on key activities including: assessment marking; assessment workflow management; course information management; quality and standards workflows; course information marketing; online module selection; module change processing;<br><br>b) Improving and streamlining processes to give time back to Academic and Professional Services staff, minimising administrative burden;<br><br>c) Improving the quality and security of information; enabling easier access to data across systems and removing duplication of data entry. |
| 4) Ensuring that Digital Transformation is conducive to inclusion, diversity and wellbeing | Success for All Our Students<br><br>Valuing Educators<br><br>Global 21st Century Education<br><br>Graduates of Distinction | a) Seeking opportunities to enhance connectedness using technology, though not creating new forms of isolation;<br><br>b) Fully evaluating the implications of any new technology or innovation on inclusion, diversity and wellbeing;<br><br>c) Providing information and support for staff and students to maximise the benefits of Digital Transformation and protect against misuse. |

**Priority E: To Articulate a Distinctive Model for Education at Exeter**

In developing a distinctive international-facing undergraduate and taught postgraduate portfolio (Priorities A and B), there is an opportunity to look holistically at our offer and seek to achieve more than a series of incremental enhancements. In doing so, it is important that we build on our strengths while learning from Universities around the world who are leading change or are established examples of excellence.

Throughout academic year 2019/20, we will conduct consultation, market research and desk-based enquiry to inform the articulation of an Exeter model. We will soft-launch and pilot some elements of this in 2020/21 and 2021/22 and, if the weight of evidence supports it, market a distinctive offering in 22/23.

The outline model is as follows:

- At undergraduate level to continue to offer professional accredited and single honours degrees and to develop a portfolio of 'liberal studies' programmes (an evolution and extension of our current combined honours and interdisciplinary programmes). All programmes should, by default, be able to integrate periods of study in industry and/or abroad of flexible duration.

- The 'liberal studies' portfolio of programmes are conceived as enabling students to study the same subject areas as professional and specialist programmes alongside thematic minors and with the option to create a longitudinal portfolio.

    – Thematic minors would promote structured engagement in interdisciplinary study and include minors focused on future careers and graduate-level employment. These can build on current 'with proficiency' offerings (Language; Applied Data Analysis; Entrepreneurship); however, the scope can be much broader and proposals that emerged through consultation included: Creativity; Inter-Cultural Competence; Sustainability.

    – An assessed longitudinal portfolio would enable students to capture their personal engagement with research, impact and societal engagement related to their programme. In addition to being the natural home for capstone research projects, this would also be the location for engagement with Grand Challenges, Green Consultants, Think-Try-Do, etc. The curated portfolio would represent a component of degree assessment.

- At postgraduate level, a similar thematic minor model would be available with explicit focus on career readiness for business, industry and third-sector organisations across the spectrum of sectors that we face through our research and impact: e.g. 'leadership in Creative Industries'; 'management in Biotechnology'; 'proficiency in data science and artificial intelligence'; etc.

- All programmes – undergraduate and postgraduate – should plan and design learning and teaching with an explicit aim of continual development of learning community, enabling students to engage in effective face to face and online social learning, and to lay foundations for community cohesion and positive wellbeing.

# Implementing our Strategy

The values, priorities and proposed model set out above represent an ambitious vision for what Education at Exeter will look like by 2025. We recognise that this will not all be achievable immediately and that the manifestation of this vision will look different from department to department. Successfully achieving our vision through these priority areas will depend upon facilitating the engagement of the whole University learning community in its implementation. We will do this:

- by working closely with Academic Departments, Colleges, Professional Services and our Students' Unions

- using our existing frameworks for Quality Review, Student Representation and Academic Development, which we will refine as needed. In particular, we will:

  – encourage disciplines to develop new Education Action Plans drawing on a range of feedback sources and with the priorities of the Education Strategy in mind

  – encourage module leaders to critically review modules, considering how – over time – they can revise these to align with the priorities of the Education Strategy

  – engage external experts, employers and alumni to provide objective perspectives on our programmes

  – ensure that the Education Strategy is embedded in provision under the Exeter Academic

- piloting and learning from new initiatives, opportunities and approaches, and sharing examples of inspirational practice

- establishing an advisory group, including those involved in the consultation process, students and external expert stakeholders to oversee the ongoing implementation of the Strategy

# What will success look like?

With our Learning Community, we will continually evaluate our progress in delivering this strategy against implementation plans and through existing review processes. In the long term, success will be judged against Characteristics of Excellence outlined at the outset of this Strategy. We will be succeeding if our students, staff and stakeholders, when asked, are able to positively identify their experience of education at Exeter in these statements.

We will regard quantitative measures of success as proxies that indicate that we are moving in the right direction toward achieving our vision – the result of pursuing enhancements and change through our priority areas. Nonetheless, there are some important markers that will help us to identify that we have realised our shared vision for Education by 2025:

- Within the Russell Group, we will achieve the narrowest gaps in access, continuation, attainment and progression with respect to disadvantage: gender, ethnicity, nationality, (dis)ability, age;

- Our student population will be 25% international, 30-35% postgraduate, and 10-20% off-campus;

- Our staff will be recognised as innovators and leaders in education, recognised for example by Fellowships of AdvanceHE, National Teaching Fellowships, and the institution's global reputation for Education;

- We will maintain our 'Gold' status in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), with 75% of students studying in Gold subjects and none in Bronze subjects.

University of Exeter

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