



## **Capturing educational gain through the Plymouth Compass: University of Plymouth case study**

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### **Institutional context**

A core pillar of our strategy is to provide an educational experience that is experiential and research-enhanced, supported by the provision of an innovative educational portfolio. Our strategy acknowledges the diversity of our student population which makes a significant and positive contribution to the University. We have approximately 15,000 undergraduates who study primarily full time. Most of our student population (66%) is drawn from the South West, an area of the UK characterised by low rates of progression into HE. We have a higher-than-average number of students with a declared disability (20.5%), from state schools (93.8%), and low participation neighbourhoods (15.3%). We also have a significant population of commuter students (21.6%) in addition to a growing number of students who choose to stay at home for their studies (8.5%). Our graduates provide a critical skilled graduate-level workforce for the regional economy and society whilst also allowing our students to compete in a global market. These factors informed the approach taken to identify a measure of educational gain which is cognisant of where our students have come from and what they have the potential to achieve whilst studying at Plymouth and following their graduation.

### **Educational Gain**

The success of our students is defined by the acquisition of skills and values relevant to their current and future employability, and society – themes which frame our approach to measuring educational gain. Our measure of educational gain is based on the [Plymouth Compass](#) - a resource co-produced with students in 2015. It was originally designed to help students *navigate* their way through their university experience; prompting them to reflect on how their studies, and wider experiences, support their academic, civic, professional and personal development. It sought to provide students with a 'common language' through which they could articulate their development within, and beyond, university. The Plymouth Compass also prompted students to recognise that their development was shaped as much by their experiences outside of the formal taught curriculum as within it.

The Compass framed the University of Plymouth experience as resulting in graduates that could be defined as:

- Critical and Creative **Learners** – characterised as able to learn independently, explore new avenues with confidence and think in critical, creative and enterprising manner, enabling them to function effectively in a complex and even changing society.
- Sustainable and Global **Citizens** – able to contribute to a more sustainable future as an informed, responsible, and active citizen, locally and globally.
- Competent and Confident **Professionals** – ready to play an active role in shaping a sustainable society and economy and understand the importance of managing their own career and promote a positive, work-life balance.
- Resilient and Thriving **Individuals** – who value and develop the wellbeing of themselves and others and appreciates the role of evidence-based ways towards a flourishing life.

In each of these four domains attributes essential to success at university, and in future employment, are detailed. For example, within the 'individual' domain the Compass prompts students to embrace opportunities to 'connect with others', 'be active' and 'keep learning'. Student-facing guidance offers advice on how students may engage with, and develop, attributes detailed within each domain. This guidance is complemented by short student case studies which explore how students have drawn on attributes developed by engagement with the Plymouth Compass following graduation – these illustrate explicit connections between curricular / extra-curricular activities and student development.

Students use Pebblepad, an e-portfolio tool which they can access whilst at Plymouth, and beyond, to explore, plan and reflect on activities that align with Plymouth Compass attributes. It provides recommendations and prompts students to take ownership of their development, and map this out for the duration of their studies.

As the Plymouth Compass has an established role within the University of Plymouth student journey, and the expectation for a measure of educational gain to capture students' whole university experience, accounting for experiences in / outside of the formal curriculum, the Plymouth Compass represented an obvious choice on which to focus a measure of educational gain.

The University of Plymouth was awarded Gold in the TEF 2023 exercise. However, we recognise the need to continually evolve our provision and are currently working on a revise and refresh of the Plymouth Compass, working with a group of students and key groups within the University. Stakeholders from across the institution, including academic staff, careers professionals, student support services, UPSU and students themselves will ensure it remains reflective of the contemporary student experience and life post-graduation and upon employment. To ensure that their educational gain is well positioned for future employment we are also working with a network of key employers. Our revisions to the Plymouth Compass will heed recommendations presented by the [QAA](#) (2022) regarding measures of educational gain; the intention is to allow students to recognise the transformative power of their higher education experience. This will provide an individual measure of educational gain, students can take ownership of, and become increasingly aware of the transferability of their experiences to the world of work.

Complementing individual, qualitative narratives of education gain, the University is planning to use learner analytics, incorporating multiple data points, to capture students educational gain at a range of different levels. This approach will draw on existing analytical expertise gained through our extensive Access and Participation activities, which are based on the smart and efficient use of data across our diverse student population. Here it is anticipated that measures such as entry tariff, educational attainment, continuation and GO data will

feature in a newly created educational gain dashboard that will be used across the institution. In support of this, there will be further, targeted use of data which will allow us to focus interventions on specific student groups who are recognised as at risk of not fulfilling their educational potential due to a range of factors. This work will be framed by the Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO) in HE theory of change and place a spotlight on the engagement of students from these groups and evaluation of the impact of specific interactions on their educational gain.

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