

THE Awards 2018
University of the Year submission

Rebels with a cause: delivering on our ambition

The University's founding vision was based on excellence in education and research – and a commitment to offering a transformational education and making the world a better place. 50 years on, we have seized the opportunity to reconnect and refresh our founding vision by putting students and staff success at the centre of what we do, with tremendous effect.

Our challenge has been to stand out from the crowd and to get across the distinctiveness that marks the University of Essex out, not just in terms of what we say, but do. At Essex we have chosen to lean in to our rebellious past, to take a distinctive approach to living our values and taking responsibility for shaping our future. Embracing a 'challenger' identity has given us the institutional confidence to project a strong sense of self. We have focussed on getting the brilliant basics right, on developing compelling differences, and seeking out major game changers. Above all, we have made Essex a home for staff and students who want to make the world a better place and our achievements in academic year 2016-17 are a culmination of this.

Sharing a common Essex vision, we have worked in partnership from the outset with our amazing Students' Union. Committed to becoming 'the World's most student-centered organisation', everything they do is about delivering on four powerful promises to students. Together we have been determined to ensure that we put students at the centre of our thinking. From identifying and recruiting students on the basis of potential and not just on prior achievement to focussing our combined efforts on improving the educational experience, performance and outcomes of our students. The effect has been to create graduates with a distinctive set of attributes who want to go out into the world and make a difference. The award of TEF Gold in 2017 is testament to our success.

Other manifestations of us 'living our values' and standing up for what is right have included:

- being the first University to take action to close the gender pay gap for professorial staff, ensuring no pay gap across all grades;
- ensuring we pay the Living Wage Foundation living wage;
- changing the employment status of our Graduate Teaching Assistants to staff when they teach;
- a systematic approach to decasualising the workforce;
- and standing up for fair pay of staff through pensions.

We have taken an innovative approach to working with businesses and external partners:

- appointing the first Chief Scientific Advisor to a County Council;
- creating a science and business research park and only working with businesses who, through their tenancy agreement, commit to working with students and staff;
- ranked in the top 5 for Knowledge Transfer Partnerships;
- and above all ensuring we nurture impactful research.

As we look towards our new Strategic Plan period we have a renewed sense of purpose, a shared sense of pride in our progress and achievements, and an almost palpable institutional excitement about our ambitions for the future.