



“This is a university that is putting people first. The gender pay gap exists everywhere, but this university said what no one else dared to say: ‘There is an easy way to get rid of the pay gap – spend the money necessary to get rid of it. And do it now.’”

This observation from one of the Times Higher Education Awards judges touches on one of numerous bold initiatives taken by the University of Essex in 2016-17 as it reconnected with its founding vision and values.

How has it done this? In Essex’s own words, “by putting students and staff success at the centre of what we do, with tremendous effect”. It has been unabashed in its strategy to recruit students on the basis of potential rather than just prior achievement, and it has helped them to fulfil that potential.

It has delivered on its pledge to value staff in concrete ways, including a systematic decasualisation of its workforce, through pay equality and with staff contracts for graduate teaching assistants.

Essex’s strategy has drawn inspiration from its history of being on the side of the “radical”, of not falling victim to groupthink; its focus on teaching and learning is transforming the lives of a growing student body of whom more than a third are from families with an annual income of less than £25,000.

What are universities if not communities of talented, committed people? By putting those people – both staff and students – first, the University of Essex has every right to its claim to be a “home for staff and students who want to make the world a better place”. It is also our University of the Year.