SOUTH THAMES COLLEGES' GROUP
TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK (TEF) – Year 3
Provider Written Submission

1. Year 3 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Context – 1.1 TEF Year 2 Silver Award

In June 2017 Kingston College was awarded SILVER by the TEF assessors (at that time valid for 3 years). The statement of findings providing an explanation of the TEF panel's judgement will be referred to later in section 2, and in the Executive Summary, to assist TEF assessors in recognising the similar characteristics of the newly merged South Thames Colleges' Group to the attributes of the successor college and 2017 TEF SILVER recipient;

1.1 Merger - South Thames Colleges' Group – it's composition

On 1 August 2017 a type B college merger took place and brought together;

- Kingston College (a large mixed- economy further education college [FEC], situated in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, South West London)
- Carshalton College (dissolved on 31 July 2017 - a medium-sized general FEC and the only provider of higher education [HE] within the London Borough of Sutton).
- South Thames College (dissolved on 31 July 2017 – a large mixed economy FEC operating from 2 campuses both in the London Borough of Wandsworth).

In this type B merger of the three named colleges, two have been dissolved and their property, rights and liabilities transferred into the remaining college (in this case Kingston College – the successor body).All 3 colleges deliver vocational education and skills training (see below section 2.1).The South Thames Colleges' Group includes one additional college - Merton – which is located in Morden and in 2009 had merged with South Thames College. As part of this more recent merger Merton has been revived as a College brand (no HE provision currently exists).

The successor body, Kingston College, which had at the time of merger a legal title of Kingston College Corporation –has now, following approval from the Minister of State for Education, changed its name to South Thames Colleges' Group.

In Autumn 2017 following this, and similar FE college mergers, the Chief Executive of HEFCE in considering all FE College mergers of a similar type made the decision that where the merged core TEF metrics of any new College group did not match the "hypothesis state" of the existing TEF award the duration of any existing TEF award would be reduced to one year and a new application for TEF rating should be made under the Year Three arrangements.

1.3 TEF Core Metric Distortion

The published TEF core and split metrics for Kingston College (for the year 2 application) were correct, and for the newly merged South Thames Colleges' Group College (for the year 3 application) are also correct. However, as explained in the following paragraphs, and more fully in a later section entitled "Commentary on the TEF Core Metrics", due to the computation of the metrics and the treatment of some of the College's franchised provision metric data has been arrived at which, in some ways, is not fully representative, and is in part misleading of the College's performance.

The principle of TEF data being 'owned' by the institution where a student studies for their first year is understood. The College data correctly recognises that. The assumption behind this, as explained at the HEFCE TEF events during 2016/17 was to reflect where the student experienced the majority of their teaching – either wholly at the College to whom they were franchised, or in the very common 2/1 model with only the final year of study at the university franchiser.

At the South Thames Colleges' Group this assumption holds true for all but two of our franchised programmes – Foundation Year Zero in Science, and Foundation Year Zero in Computing and Maths[1]. Here the students study for only 1 year (their first) at Kingston College and for 3 at Kingston University. The distortion of the TEF metrics in respect of NSS and employment data is particularly significant because these two courses represent a very high proportion of the College's overall HE population. In 2017/18 the total student numbers on these programmes stand at 295 representing 20% of the total HE Population, with similar proportions of students on these programmes in previous years (2016/17 - 367 students, representing 22% of the HE population) This is further exacerbated due to the eligibility rules of the NSS which restrict a significant number of the College's other HE students who study for HNC, Top-up to Foundation Degrees and HNDs from being eligible. Their opinion of their experience is therefore not captured within TEF metrics.

In the TEF year 2 Provider Written Statement the College asserted that judgements in connection with Teaching Quality and specifically 'the teaching on my course' (TQ1), 'assessment and feedback' (TQ4), and 'academic support' (TQ1/3/4) should be based upon the published NSS data for the College which more truly reflects the product of the experience of students where the whole or majority of their teaching has taken place at the College. In 2017 with Silver being awarded the TEF Panel accepted this assertion with the Statement of Findings (appearing on page 1), including the specific the comment - "*While the College is below benchmark for teaching, the [TEF] Panel deemed this was effectively addressed in the provider submission*". (TQ1/4)

Section 4 of this 2018 Provider Written Statement will make the detailed assertion that whilst the new merged College's Group does have a larger HE student population the volume and proportion of these Foundation Year learners still has a significant distorting impact upon the College Group's core TEF Metrics.

2. <u>New College Group Context</u> - 2.1 Merged Group College characteristics

An explanation of the birth of the new South Thames Colleges' Group and its 3 component parts appears below and from this and an exploration of the contextual TEF metrics it can be seen that the merged College Group displays the same positive characteristics (listed below) as identified by the year 2 TEF assessors as recently as June 2017 in the successor College, Kingston, and stated in full in the "Teaching Excellence Framework: Year two Statement of findings Kingston College";

- *"students' academic experiences tailored to the individual (TQ2)*
- *small group sizes(TQ2)*
- *pedagogical approaches specifically informed by the needs of a student body (TQ1/4)*
- *where almost all students (*80% of the newly merged College*) enter with low or non-tariff*
- *relatively high …and appropriate levels of contact time securing high levels of engagement and commitment to learning and study (TQ1)*
- *high quality dedicated space for he students that supports learning,incl. specialist spaces (LE1)*
- *an embedded institutional culture that facilitates excellent teaching including through high numbers of staff with teaching qualifications" (TQ2).*

2.2 The decision to merge

In December 2016, the Governing Bodies of Carshalton, Kingston and South Thames Colleges and the board of Kingston and Sutton Educational Partnership (KSEP), which was, as part of Federated arrangements, the shared services company owned by Carshalton and Kingston Colleges) decided to merge for two major reasons: (1)there was a strong argument that a merged College in SW London will achieve greater resilience and influence than could be achieved by the continuation of 3 separate entities giving a unique opportunity to renew FE in this important sub-

[1] These two programme have now been conflated into one Integrated Foundation Year for the start of 2016-17

region (2) Government policy at the time sought a process of change in the FE sector designed to consolidate its institutions and help strengthen its ability to handle future financial pressures.

In making this decision, Governors adopted a vision for the new College Group (key points below) that built on the historic legacies of the three Colleges, the historical focus on teaching, learning, achievement and employability (all fundamental to the Group's application for a TEF award)(TQ2):

- "Local delivery in a regional context: building on our valued local identities to continue to provide people and businesses with the skills they need.
- Realising growth: this new group will have the versatility to respond to new or expanding markets and the strategic scale to turn these into opportunities across the region.
- Promoting excellence and innovation in curriculum design, delivery and teaching: our new structures will need to secure solid, consistent improvement and the ability to do things differently.
- Delivering efficiency and the means to invest: the new college group will be able to manage cost decisively, handle curriculum overlaps, create financial capital and invest wisely in learning, people and buildings.
- Increasing relevance: the success of this strong new college group will be measured by its ability to meet and satisfy needs within the local and regional economies and population.
- Building resilience and sustainability: the new group will have sufficient scale and depth to handle tough challenges in the years ahead and provide the potential for investment for the benefit of learners and the local and regional economies and population.
- Leading social justice: the new group will retain its commitment to delivering the very best outcomes for all who users of Further Education [and Higher Education] in S W London.
- Valuing partnership: the success of the new group will be derived in part from its partnerships, so it will foster trust, consultation and shared solutions" (TQ1/4)

2.3 South Thames Colleges Group – ethos and vision

Above all South Thames Colleges' Group, as were its individual predecessor colleges, is a **learning and teaching** institution that welcomes a very diverse profile of students and supports excellent teaching (TQ 1/2). The focus upon learners, inclusion, social mobility and communities is readily identifiable in the following extracts from the merger consultation document published in April 2017 entitled "*The South Thames College Group – a new college for south west London – rationale for change - A consultation on a proposal for merger – Carshalton College, Kingston College and South Thames College*". The table below lists the principal benefits and opportunities of merger identified in the above publication, already achieving fruition and of particular relevance for learners, learning, achievement, progression, career development and the community (TQ1/4);

For learners	For communities
➢ Enhanced curriculum which meets learners' needs, helping them to progress on to employment or further study ➢ A wider range of expert teaching staff, many of them industry experts too ➢ Improved resources and facilities to support learning and progression ➢ More opportunity to develop key enterprise and employability skills sought by employers ➢ Increased opportunities for enrichment and a diverse student population (TQ1/4,LE1/3)	➢ *Enhanced career or specialism opportunities* ➢ *Further opportunities for professional development and peer support* ➢ *A more financially stable college ensures longer-term job stability* ➢ *Greater opportunities for sharing best practice and professional expertise (TQ1/4)*

The consultation document further explains *"the benefits and opportunities will be achieved as a result of the core goal of the organisation which will be* ***to achieve outstanding results****. Success will be judged by students' achievements and their progression into higher study or sustainable careers, with a focus on Specialisation, Diversification, Responsiveness and Improvement".* As explained elsewhere these benefits are already accruing. (TQ1/4,LE1/3)

2.4 Higher Education in South Thames Colleges' Group

The table below emphasises that the College Group is one of the largest providers of HE in FE (within the top 20 nationally based on student volume), identifies the distribution of HE students (by student number and percentage of total HE student population) across the College group and emphasises the much larger numbers studying at Kingston College, the successor body and TEF Silver recipient in 2017 (70% of the 2017/18 HE population and an average of 67% over the past three years – this majority proportion increases with the recognition that one third of South Thames College HE students receive only part of the course teaching at the College (either one quarter or a half, with the remainder at the partner university) .

	Actual nos. 2017/18	% of Group HE Student pop.	Actual nos. 2016/17	% of Group HE Student pop.	Actual nos. 2015/16	% of Group HE Student pop.
Kingston College	1,022	70	1,071	63	1,344	68
Carshalton College	171	12	205	12	232	12
South Thames College	278*	18	412*	25	410	20
College Group Total	1,471*	100	1,688*	100	1,986	100

Table 1. South Thames Colleges Group - Higher Education Enrolments 2015/17 as at 1 October (*South Thames Colleges numbers include sub contracted numbers to London College of Contemporary Art in 2017/18 and 2016/17)

The College Group's HE provision started in the early 1990s, meaning that the Colleges are some of the longest established providers of HE in the FE sector, with more 25 years of HE experience. The programmes at the Colleges are inclusive of BA (Hons) degrees, foundation degrees, together with a prominent Degree Foundation Year Zero programme and a diverse portfolio of Pearson Higher National programmes. The HE subject areas taught are diverse, ranging for example, from digital arts, dance, art and design, to early years, science, engineering, computing, travel and tourism, teacher education and a large business provision. The College Group is unusual in that it has seven university validating partners Kingston University, University of West London, Middlesex University, University of Greenwich, University of Roehampton, Canterbury Christchurch University and University of Northampton in addition to Pearson for its Higher National programmes.

The 2014 QAA HE Reviews of the separate colleges identified that all had the strategic aim of delivering flexible, high quality, learner centred, business and vocational education and training.

2.5 **The merged College – how it shares the attributes and ethos of the separate colleges**

The College's HE provision offers opportunities to students who may not otherwise have considered a higher education pathway. Widening participation is at the very core of its values. The College Group's published OFFA Access Agreements and its historic "*HEFCE funding for widening access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, improving retention and improving provision for disabled students monitoring returns*" provides details of this commitment.

Whilst the new college group only came into existence in August 2017 the relationship between the Colleges has been established for a longer period and its direction, leadership and values have been aligned for some time. Since 2012 Kingston and Carshalton Colleges have operated as a Federation with Kingston and Sutton Educational Partnership Ltd. providing the shared service support (including HE quality assurance) and more importantly shared leadership at Principal, Deputy Principal and functional Director levels. Throughout the academic year 2016/17 the 3 colleges working towards merger created a number of work streams to align operations and ethos and the HE work stream group led by the Head of College of Kingston supported by his Curriculum Director for HE had significant impact and "head start" in bringing the new Group's HE together.

An illustration of the strong working relationship between Kingston and Carshalton Colleges whilst federated demonstrates how post-merger support and sharing of good practice for all HE courses delivered on different sites will continue. During 2014/15 Carshalton experienced staffing difficulties with a large turnover of staff leading to student dissatisfaction on certain courses

(identifiable within the NSS and core TEF metrics). Kingston supported Carshalton by providing markers and second markers as marking turnaround times became delayed due to the staff shortage. In addition the quality team's ability to work across the federation enabled reinstatement of transparent quality systems to the college as new and existing staff were trained and supported by the HE Quality Manager assigned to both colleges. This sharing of resources, processes and systems allowed for a rapid improvement in quality, improving the student and staff experience and ultimately contributed to improved student satisfaction shown by improved NSS scores.(LE1&2)

The long, substantial and wide experience in the HE sector of all the constituent parts of the College, and the particularly extensive experience and resources of the successor body, Kingston College, undoubtedly equips the College and it's lecturing teams to deliver high quality teaching, and be successful in ensuring that their students fully understand the requirements of their programmes, are able to support them to achieve and exceed their objectives and provide sound preparation for employment, or, for further study. (TEF TQ1/2/3/4 LE2)

In the recent past, all three of the College's HE offering constituent parts have undergone two successful QAA reviews, with Internal Quality Enhancement Review (IQER) in 2009 and Higher Education Review (HER)[2] in 2014. This confirmed that the Colleges' offering of Higher Education '*met UK expectations*' and made reference the '*the close working relationships with degree-awarding bodies at programme level*' as a particular aspect of good practice. (LE2)

These close working relationships and interactions with university colleagues enhance the quality of support that teaching teams are able to provide (LE2). This in turn, enables the confident delivery of the awarding body's requirements to enhance opportunities for students in achieving and exceeding their expectations These close working relationships are also exemplified through commentaries seen in the 2017/18 external examiner reports. (TQ3).

HE learning and teaching in all parts of the merged college is embedded as part of the overall curriculum offerings and not as a separate HE offering. The vast majority (90%) of lecturing staff who teach on HE programmes also teach on FE programmes. Only very small proportions, (10%) of lecturing staff are committed exclusively to HE and they tend to be dedicated to our full Honours Degree offerings, including L6 teaching. This malleability of the staff and their experience across this learning range, FE through to HE, provides a continuum of teaching and a deep understanding of the student body as students start their HE journey. By appreciating their starting point on an HE programme, lecturing teams are better able to provide both the support that the students need in the transition to HE and later, the requirement to strengthen independent learning skills as the students move though the HE journey and recognise the need for a more autonomous approach to learning. Familiarisation with the BTEC philosophy of assessment also particularly supports the learning and teaching taking place on the higher national programmes that represent approaching half of the College's HE provision. (TQ1/4,LE3)
The Deputy Head of QA at Kingston College's 2nd largest university partner, referred in December 2016 to the College's '*commitment, principles, and values as a teaching college dedicated to teaching and learning and how these permeate your HE delivery as a matter of course'* (TQ1/4).

As recently as June 2016 the successor College and the group's major HE provider, Kingston, once again, achieved '*Good '* in its Ofsted inspection. This underlines the College's success as a learning and teaching institution. It was graded '*Good* ' for Overall Effectiveness, for "Quality of Teaching and Learning", "Outcomes for Learners" and for "Leadership and Management". (TEF TQ 1/4).These findings are equally, albeit broadly applicable, to HE teaching, particularly so as the provision of HE is embedded within the College curriculum structures, and not separate. More than 90% of teaching staff are involved with both HE and other (FE) teaching. The June 2016 Ofsted report includes the following comments explaining the "*good*" grading (TQ1/4);

- *"Since the previous inspection, the proportion of learners who successfully gain their qualifications has remained high; the majority of apprentices achieve their qualifications in*

[2] In this document extracts of the published QAA HER review report are proceeded by the reference to the paragraph in the report. All extracts appear in italics. The published report is available on the QAA website and on the provider website.

the planned timescale.

- *Teaching and learning are well supported by good resources.*
- *Learners achieve high standards in their lessons, including in their practical work.*
- *Teachers & all other staff provide highly beneficial and well-focused support for learners.*
- *Staff foster positive attitudes to learning. Learners' behaviour is good & they feel safe and are respectful to their peers & college staff.*
- *Learners gain good skills to prepare them for employment & are successful in getting jobs*."

Notwithstanding the above, there is recognition that HE does need different direction, quality assurance systems and processes, along with a strong HE ethos. To ensure this the merged College has enhanced the operations of all its component parts to include a committee structure and function dedicated to HE, and HE cross group quality assurance systems/processes. The Group's Higher Education Board (HEAB) has a cross college strategic function -agendas include programme planning, complaints, student feedback, appeals, external examiner reports (TQ1/4).

Teaching quality is reviewed through a number of ways inclusive of peer review to appraisals, internally and externally, through the range of University Partner Reviews or Pearson Annual Monitoring, together with External Examiner visits. External Examiner reports are seen as extremely important documents that provide a window to the quality of the teaching, the learning environment and outcomes of every programme and as such, provide oversight of practice across the College Group. Up until this point and for a number of years now a common 'triple loop' analysis system has been in place across the federated Carshalton and Kingston Colleges. In a 'first loop', all reports are analysed at programme and school levels within the HE monitoring reports. Additionally, as a 'second loop', all reports are reviewed independently by HE Quality and rated using qualitative criteria. For example, a report rated Green demonstrates 'no quality assurance issues, or rare recommendations, together with consistent practice that is above the level normally expected and demonstrates deliberate steps to enhance quality'. Overview reports are then tabled at the Group's HE Academic Boards. The 'third loop' includes the detailed responses to each External Examiner report, as required by all partner universities. These reports and responses are discussed at partner level, with feedback though university partner annual reports and link tutor reports. This loop system assures accordance with B7 of the Quality Code. This year this process has been rolled out the Group and all reports across the College Group have been reviewed independently- an example of moving forward towards agreed and common practice. Assessment feedback, and support are common emerging themes across the Group demonstrating continued good / commendable practice. Other frequently mentioned themes noted as good / commendable practice include organisation and management of the programmes, learning environment, quality of teaching, relevance to employability and student feedback.(TQ1/4)

The Group HEAB provides the conduit to the College's Group Leadership Team, and Governors' Quality Learning Standards Committee [and from there to the full Board of Governors].

The Group Higher Education Operations Group (HEOG) coordinates service support such as admissions, marketing, student supports services. Additionally a Higher National Group meets to assure both Pearson requirements and college HE requirements across all HNC/D programmes. Both these groups report to the HEAB. At the time of Kingston College's March 2014 QAA HER, these enhancements to deliberative structures were only planned and were '*affirmed* 'by the Reviewers as a function likely "*to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to student*." This infrastructure has undoubtedly fulfilled that potential, driven the HE ethos for Kingston College, including teaching and learning, learning environment and student engagement initiatives and the extension of these functions/ meetings across the Group was an immediate and unquestioned merger action with immediate impact. (TQ1/4)

This group wide installation of HE quality assurance and enhancement to assure the quality of the Group's HE (in order to meet internal expectations and the external expectations of its awarding bodies and HEFCE) has ensured the maintenance and effectiveness of these functions which were recognised at the successor [Kingston] College's HER in March 2014 [*2.26] the quality of learning opportunities and teaching practices is systematically reviewed, drawing on a variety of sources of*

information including the observation of teaching and learning, external examiner reports, student feedback and the review of data on student retention, progression and achievement. Also, [2.22] the College collects and analyses data, including recruitment, progression and achievement data, to ensure the effectiveness and enhancement of learning and teaching (TQ1/3).

The HE student voice in the successor Kingston College has been strong and the use of a range of approaches to obtain feedback from its stakeholders (students, staff and employers), including, through end of module feedback, staff student consultative committees, boards of studies, focus groups, surveys, employer forums, learning walks and appraisals is now mirrored across the Group. The QAA HER March 2014 recognised the clarity and effectiveness of this function: [2.39] "*There is a clear structure in place for formal student engagement through the Student Council and student representation on College committees such as the Higher Education Student Forum, Staff-Student Consultative Committee (SSCC), Boards of Study, Higher Education Focus Groups and the College governing body. Students' contributions are sought and valued through these formal structures. The review team saw evidence that student attendance at SSCCs and Boards of Study is good and that part-time students are also represented and attend meetings. Students also engage informally through open and easy access to both teaching and support staff".(TQ1)*

3 **Teaching Quality 3. 1 The characteristics of teaching and learning at the College**

"{Kington] College's clear approach to staff professional development designed to enhance learning opportunities and teaching practices" and the College*'s* recent engagement *"with the Higher Education Academy in becoming a full member, providing staff development events and supporting staff to become fellows and engage with the UK Professional Framework for Higher Education (UKPSFHE). Partner awarding bodies approve staff teaching on their awards and provide professional development events and support for College staff"* was recognised in HE QAA HER in March 2014 [2.19] and that clarity of approach and commitment to continual improvement is a central ethos of the new College Group's vision and day to day operation. 'Strategic Partner' membership of the HEA supports the College in actively encouraging all HE staff are actively encouraged to become members of the HEA and demonstrate an understanding of the UKPSFHE). The college supports staff to by providing CPD days dedicated to writing submissions for Fellowship. The College currently has four Senior Fellows, four Fellows, one Associate Fellow and there are a further twelve working towards Fellowships including those at Principal and Senior level. The merger has provided this as a new opportunity for lecturing colleagues at South Thames and Carshalton Colleges who attended cross college HE CPD during Summer 2017 as part of the approach to merger arrangements. The individual development of lecturers, the cross-colleges/group sharing of good practice, and the widened engagement with the HEA is contributing directly to the uplift of teaching quality. (TQ1-4) (LE2)

Face to face teaching is mainly delivered by seminar, and in many practical subjects by workshops. Average group size is 14.60 (1,471 students – 101 groups – TEF year 2 for KC only 13.27) .On some courses this is actually lower. The use of the large 'lecture' was discontinued at the College some 6 years ago as it proved less effective for the lower entry cohorts who benefit much more from greater opportunity for interaction with the lecturer, higher levels of 1-2-1 support, the ability to work with peers. The College is mindful that "too small" can be disadvantageous, in cases where course demand is lower arrangements such as this described below on Fda and BA (Hons) Top Up Art and Design, and commended by the External Examiner, takes place

"*As a specialised art and design course, the cohorts are quite small and to facilitate the peer group learning within this academic year the 2nd and 3rd years are taught together within the same studio. Coupled with a committed course team providing additional online email feedback, this is very supportive for all the students and motivates shared practice and ambition throughout the whole student community*" (LE1&3 TQ1&2)

The only programmes where 'lecture' style remains are on the Foundation Year in Science, Computing and Maths, and Foundation Degree in Pharmaceutical and Chemical Sciences. A small proportion of teaching and learning is delivered in this way although this is alongside a greater

proportion of seminars and workshops. This delivery structure is designed to support transition of the Foundation Year Students to the following 3 years of study at the partner university where 'lecture' delivery represents a larger component of teaching and on the Foundation Degree to be consistent with the experience on the remainder of the course taught alongside at the university.

The College's weighted contact hours per week are similar at 28.20 to the 27.70 quoted in the TEF year 2 application for Kingston College and is calculated in the same way . This reflects the small group dimension. The weekly (unweighted) average contact hours range from approximately 5 hours per week for part time to between 12 and 18 hours per week for full- time courses (TQ1&2).

University partnered courses operate to a more traditional HE timetable of approx. 26 to 28 weeks per academic year the majority of the College's vocational delivery is taught over more weeks, as many as 34/36 in some cases, to provide maximum opportunity for practical, performance and exhibition assessment, particularly valuable to the learners in creative subjects (TQ1&2).

3.2 Lecturing staff - appraisal, CPD, HEA engagement

The Colleges' Group as a learning and teaching organisation, requires that its lecturing staff have both academic qualifications in the subject that they teach and teaching qualifications. In most cases lecturers also have vocational experience in their teaching subject area. The vast majority of the lecturing staff (more than 90%) hold a teaching qualification. Those who do not, at the point of initial employment are required to commit to completing such a qualification within five years of employment. The College offers its own PGCE to support new employees in this situation (TQ2).

To ensure an excellent level of teaching new lecturers undertake a period of probation requiring the successful completion of two formal lessons observations. All lecturing staff engage in a bi-annual appraisal system that has a heavy focus on learning and teaching, including SMART target setting. Senior staff and learning coaches carry out 'learning walks' to observe lecturing staff, a function that provides regular and informal focus on practice. With the recent merger the College is again reviewing peer observation as potential future practice for HE. As a teaching institution, programmes are thoroughly planned and reviewed regularly to ensure currency and student feedback and employer feedback is actively welcomed in influencing assessment practice (TQ2).

Analysis of the External Examiner reports for 2016/17 identifies as one of the key strength across the College HE teams as the attention to student feedback on assessments. Approximately two thirds of the reports specifically highlight assessment feedback as an area of good practice. The following comments from the reports illustrate this good to excellent practice (TQ1&4 LE3).

Pearson HNC /HND conversion Sport and Exercise Sciences *Excellent feedback is provided by tutors and this greatly helps students to improve future grades. Students appreciate this and the extra support which they receive from tutors/tutorials.*	***.FdA and BA (Hons) Early Years (Top-up)*** *Feedback was extensive on all the scripts seen and links made to the learning outcomes alongside feedback and feed forward allowing the students to develop and improve their grades in future work.*	***FdA Health and Social Care*** *The course team's transparent assessment process is commendable. The feedback given to students is clear, constructive and will enable students to see how improvements can be made in future submissions and should help the students to achieve a higher mark in future assignments.*

The second half of 2017 has witnessed very positive development of HE provision supported by university partners who have recognised the College's flexibility in responding to learner and employer needs and the College's depth of understanding of its current and future student population and appetite for innovation. Kingston University's validation panel (December 2017) of the BA (Hons) Management and Business (which will sit at the heart of the College's new Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship) commended the College's;

- "commitment of staff to students as evidenced by the student-centred approach to documentation and the operation of the personal tutor scheme (LE3);
- commitment to innovation in teaching and learning articulated in the meeting (TQ1/4);

- speed with which the team has responded to employer demand for this course (TQ2)".

Similar commendations were made at validation events at University of West London (Sept. 2017), in respect of a BA(Hons) Specialist Hair and Media Make-up (Top-up) ,at University of Northampton in respect of BSc (Hons) Live Sound Production launched in Sept. 2017 and followed the University of West London comments in 2016 by when revalidating the partnership (TQ1/4).

BA (Hons) Digital Arts *An excellent course* *With a good reputation* *With a wide range of opportunities*	**FdA Fashion and Textiles)** *A great partnership with Kingston College which we would like to grow* *Student satisfaction rates by some substantial amount exceed the NSS benchmarks*	**BA (Hons) Acting for Stage and Media** *Excellent! Thinking back to the students we met at the revalidation they were outstanding 'celebrate more' the outstanding outcomes of the course*

Another strength exemplified through External Examiner reports as a common feature of good practice is the support offered to all HE students through tutorial and pastoral support (TQ1).

Science, Computing and Mathematics, Foundation Year *The effort from staff to support their students and work to engage them in their study should be commended.*	**FdA Early Years Kingston** *The consistency and efficiency of this programme is outstanding. The standards for this programme are as high as any other university offering a similar programme. What sets this programme apart and above many others is the dedication and passion each college's team has for their work and the support of their students.*

All staff are encouraged to reflect upon, develop and enhance their teaching practice through weekly college wide and school based continuing Professional Development (CPD) which can be self and line manager referred. Supported is available from full time College Learning Coaches in Kingston College who have been appointed specifically to support teaching, learning, innovation, and share good practice including the regular publication of the LEARN magazine. The College's approach towards CPD embraces termly staff development days including HE centric development opportunities, a separate annual staff development day for HE staff. Long course funding opportunities provide the possibility to develop specialist knowledge and skills. (TQ1/4 LE2)

3 Commentary on the core, split and supplementary TEF Metrics

As explained on page 2 (section 1.3) the published TEF core and split metrics for the College are correct. However, the principle of their computation and the treatment of some of the College's franchised provision have led to the presentation of a set of data which, in some ways, is not fully representative of the College's performance. The principle of TEF data being 'owned' by the institution where a student studies for their first year is understood. The College data correctly recognises that. The assumption behind this, as explained at the HEFCE TEF 2017/18 training events, is to reflect where the student experienced the majority of their teaching – either wholly at the College to whom they are franchised, or in the very common 2/1 model with the final year of study being at the university franchiser.

This assumption holds true for all but two of the College's franchised programmes – Foundation Year Zero in Science, and the Foundation Year Zero in Computing and Maths[3]. Here the students study for only one year (their first) at Kingston College and for three at Kingston University. The distortion of the published TEF data in respect of NSS and employment data is particularly significant because these two courses represent a very high proportion of the College's overall HE population (see page 2).This is further exacerbated by the eligibility rules of the NSS which restrict many of the College's other HE students studying for HNC, Top-up to Foundation Degrees and HNDs from being eligible. Less than 20% of the undergraduate population are eligible for the NSS.

The College asserts that judgements in connection with Teaching Quality and specifically 'the teaching on my course' (TQ1), 'assessment and feedback' (TQ4), and 'academic support' (TQ1/3/4) (all of which have negative core metric flags should be based upon the published NSS

[3] These two programme have now been conflated into one Integrated Foundation Year for the start of 2016-17

data for the College. This more truly reflects the product of the experience of students where the whole or majority of their teaching has taken place at the College. That data appears below (in section 5) for the three colleges individually, and for the merged college, calculated on a weighted average [per student number] basis and is compared to TEF and other benchmarks. (TQ1/4)

This is further supported by data from the Colleges' own HE surveys (see below section 5) which seek the feedback of students from the College's whole HE community (other than those students eligible for the NSS), from other internal forms of student feedback and that received from others, such as our university partners during annual reviews and validation events.(TQ1/4)

The published TEF data in connection with 'non-continuation' does accurately reflect the College's efforts in teaching and learning of that population of students, all of whom have had their first year study experience with the College. However this does not include the large volume of learners who will be studying at the College for one year courses (eg, Top Up [to HND/Foundation] Degree years and conversion years [from HNCs]) who will not be captured within this continuing measure (they completing and exiting in one year) - a very high proportion of whom are successful.(SO3)

The TEF core metrics for the major full- time teaching delivery mode for Student Outcomes and Learning Gain (S01/2/3) show a neutral flag against the 'employment or further study' criteria (S01) and a double negative flag against 'the highly skilled employment or further study' criteria (S01) criteria. For consistency the College considers that judgements in connection with "employment or further study' and 'highly skilled employment or further study' should be made taking into account the commentary and College data appearing in the later section "7.5 Progression to employment".

4 <u>Teaching Quality</u> (TEF TQ1/4)

The table below incorporates the published NSS results for each of the merged colleges, and for the merged college overall calculated on a weighted average [per student number] basis and is compared to TEF and other benchmarks. As explained in section 4 above, entitled 'Commentary on the TEF core metrics', the College asserts that these give a fairer and more accurate view of Teaching Quality than the TEF core metrics. They reflect the opinions of students who have studied at the College for the entirety or majority of their study period. (TQ1/4)

Questions	Question covering	KC % (153 responses)	STC % (27 responses)	CC % (30 responses)	STCG NSS weighted average 2016/17 %	NSS Sector Average % 2016/17	TEF Benchmark % Core Metrics
1-4	The teaching on my course	**83**	85	88	84.2	87	85.7
5-9	Assessment and feedback	**76**	85	69	75.7	73	76.2
10-12	Academic support	**82**	77	74	79.7	82	81.7

Table 1 South Thames Colleges' Group Weighted average responses National Student Survey 2016/17 (source NSS)

The Group's weighted average NSS data for 2016/17 indicates an average satisfaction score for '**the teaching on my course** 'which is 4.2 percentage points higher than quoted within the TEF metrics, within 1.5 percentage points of the TEF benchmark and if accepted would remove this negative 'flag' indicator within the TEF core metrics and lie in the neutral/no flag zone (TEF TQ1/3).

The average satisfaction 2016/17 score for '**assessment and feedback** 'is 4.4 percentage points above that quoted within the TEF metrics, and just 0.5 percentage point below the TEF benchmark (actually 2.7 percentage points above the published 2016/17 NSS benchmark) and if accepted would remove the negative 'flag' within the TEF metrics and lie in the neutral/no flag zone.(TQ3/4)

The average satisfaction score for 2016/17 for '**academic support** 'is 3.2 percentage points above that quoted within the TEF metrics, and 2 percentage points below the TEF benchmark (within 0.3 percentage points of the published NSS benchmark) and if accepted would remove this negative 'flag' indicator within the TEF core metrics and lie in the neutral/no flag zone (TQ1/4).

This more positive appreciation of the quality of teaching and learning at the College from students wholly studying at the College is also supported by internal College surveys of HE students. This data appears below, is drawn from the HE student opinion of all 3 of the colleges within the group – Kingston and Carshalton Colleges as Federated Colleges operated identical student feedback processes. South Thames Feedback is from a similar but not identical survey.

Questions	Question covering	KC % (400 responses)	STC % (55 responses)	CC % (20 responses)	STCG Internal HE Survey weighted average 2016/17 %	NSS Sector Average % 2016/17	TEF Benchmark % Core Metrics
1-4	The teaching on my course	**85**	78	90	84.6	85.0	85.7
5-9	Assessment and feedback	**80**	78	86	81	73.7	76.2
10-12	Academic support	**84**	80	85	85	81.2	81.7

Table 2; Kingston College Internal HE Survey Responses 2016/2017 (source; College data)

The weighted averages above indicate student satisfaction levels significantly higher than the college's core TEF metrics, higher than the TEF benchmarks for "assessment and feedback" (+ 4.8 percentage points) and for 'academic support ' (+ 3.3 percentage points), higher than the College NSS results (significantly so in "assessment and feedback" and "academic support"). These results emanate from a bigger respondent pool (475) compared to the NSS (210) and could be explained by the different perception of the wider student audience. This data includes results from the Foundation Year (Science, Computing and Maths) students, mentioned earlier, and was obtained when the whole of their study had been at the College. This data and the NSS data above clearly supports the assertion that the student view of the teaching and learning experience at the College is at a higher level than demonstrated by the TEF core metrics, and that the provision is of high quality, significantly and consistently exceeding the baseline quality expected of UK HE. (TQ1/4)

This 2017 internal student survey data shows uplift from 2015/16 in student satisfaction - 'academic support' up by 1.5 percentage points, "teaching and assessment" up by 0.6 percentage points". There was a small decline in "teaching on my course" (by 1 percentage point). (TQ1/4)

Student feedback across all parts of the College - the NSS, and other student feedback mechanisms including the HE Student Forum, course based Staff/ Student Consultation Meetings and external examiner/verifier feedback identifies the following core themes (TQ1/4LE1&3):

• high levels of academic and other support; • high levels of access to academic staff; • the opportunity for multiple channels of communication and feedback.. • high quality academic feedback albeit in some cases the quality of written feedback could be improved to match the standard of the best and in some isolated cases it could be more timely.	• the provision of a range of accessible assessment opportunities • specifically from the perspective of the external examiners the maintenance of academic standards, full engagement with quality processes and quality and quantity of feedback that in the main cases exceeds that of the sector • recognition of 'value for money' education

6. <u>Learning Environment</u> (LE1)

The *"examples of strategically driven enhancements, including the establishment within the College of a dedicated higher education centre on the 11th floor, changes to the structure of the College academic team to enhance the planning and delivery of higher education provision, and the construction of a new Creative Industries Centre"* recognised in the March 2014 Kingston College QAA HE review [4. 2] have now come to fruition and at Kingston College the higher education centre mentioned above has been extended and renamed as the 'Undergraduate Centre'. The physical expansion, in addition, to the provision of extra and different open access learning spaces also represented a strategic decision to 'zone' the College. By careful relocations the upper areas of the College have become a dedicated HE space. These new and modern learning spaces, facilities and services were opened to HE students in February 2015. (LE1).

Kingston College Undergraduate Centre.
The redesign was supported by the commissioning of a 'Learning Space Review' service offered by JISC Regional Support Centre (London) which involved observations, conversations with students and staff. LRC staff visited recently refurbished university libraries/learning spaces to develop an understanding of modern and effective learning space design and furnishings.

Seven different learning zones now operate after new zones were developed on the 10th Floor with the intention of providing a variety of learning environments, enabling students to choose the most suitable for their purpose – on the 11th floor:

- Social Learning Zone including access to laptops - Undergraduate Computer Room
- Individual and Quiet Study Zones - Undergraduate Resources Room
- Two bookable Seminar Rooms – all with access to computers
- And on the 10th floor:
- Silent Study Zone –- Purposeful Group Study Zone – both with access to computers

The design has enabled the provision of an unstaffed service in the evenings from which HE students benefit by way of longer opening hours – a specific College intention resulting from student feedback.

The LRC team working with the Student Union Officer for HE and the college's Student Enrichment team continues to continually explore ways to further develop these services in the including currently the potential to develop the spaces by taking more advantage of 'Bring Your Own Devices' is also being explored. (LE1)

Kingston College - The New Creative Industries Centre opened in 2015 has now operated for more than 2 years:
The building has a wide range of industry standard facilities and equipment that are utilised for the direct benefit of our HE students e.g. BA (hons)Specialist Hair and Media Make up (top-up) have a new dedicated learning space with specialist wig making and drying, and prosthetics facilities that can be accessed both in class and for independent study. The HNC Music students have access to the state of the art music studios, live, recording and rehearsal rooms as well as a suite of Macs for music composition and creation. Additionally the BA (Hons) Acting for Stage and Media students, the FdA Media Skills students, and the HNC Performing Arts –Screen Acting and Presenting for TV and Film pathway students all utilise the new TV studio and editing facilities.

The Penny School gallery is utilised throughout the year for a wide range of HE shows, gigs and events for the full gamut of the Centre's HE student population; from comedy nights run by the BA (Hons) Acting for Stage and Media students, to Music gigs run by our HNC Music Production students, to the more traditional Art and Design exhibitions. The students are using it more than ever and the College was delighted by the positive feedback received from our University of West London partners during recent course revalidations and annual monitoring meeting held on site. (LE1)

All parts of the College Group will move in September 2018 to the use of the Moodle platform which will be further upgraded. This Moodle VLE platform is used extensively by lecturers and students not only as a repository of materials but also as an interactive tool including the use of a wide range of formative and summative assessment technology. Full- time E- Learning and ILT co-ordinators are supporting the development of new innovative uses. Pro-Monitor, the on-line integrated student monitoring, support and communication system has become the College's key embedded and impactful tool to support target setting and monitoring of achievement. The personal development planning (PDP) function of Pro-monitor provides vital support in student objective setting, together with reflection on studies and progress. Pro-monitor also acts, via the gradebook function, as a means for students to monitor performance. (LE2&3)

The support provided to students in their transition into higher education was recognised by the 2014 HER, the number of students who study on FE programmes at the College and progress to HE programmes has further increased and represents the largest feeder institution to HE in the country. The influence of Kingston College's participation in the NUS Student Engagement Project has been beneficial to the Group with cross-college Freshers' and Inductions Events. In addition to being a valuable vehicle for the delivery in a different format of topics such as PREVENT they have contributed to the development of a greater HE community, and helped promote and celebrate the College's facilities dedicated to this group of HE learners. (LE1)

7. Student Outcomes and Learning Gain (S01/2/3) 7.1 Employment or further study

The TEF core metrics for the major full- time teaching delivery mode show one neutral flag (+) against the 'employment or further study' criteria (S01) and one double negative (--) flag against 'the highly skilled employment or further study' criteria (S01) criteria. The earlier section 1.3 explained that whilst the TEF data was correct, the TEF principle of 'ownership' (students are allocated to the institution where their 1st year takes place) causes some distortion to this data.

For consistency and fairness and in the same way that the College considered that the NSS data within the TEF core metrics, and emanating partly from students on the Foundation Years in Science, Computing and Maths was not truly reflective of their experience at Kingston College (that study experience represented just one year and a minority of 25% of their overall learning experience), the College presents data below in relation to 'Students Outcomes and Learning Gain' which the College considers to provide a fair view of the College's performance against these outcomes and demonstrates performance in respect of students whose study has been exclusively at the College. The College asserts that TEF judgements in respect of Student Outcomes and Learning Gain should be made with some reference to TEF core metrics but by reference to the outcomes for those students who have experienced the whole of their teaching and learning at the College (SO1/3).

7.2 Learner Profiles and impact upon teaching and learning (LE3 &S03)

The TEF contextual data identifies that the significant majority of HE learners at the College enter with modest entry qualifications, and/ or with non-traditional (tariff) qualifications (full time, part time and total students - 80% (low or non UCAS). This very significant majority of learners regarded as 'higher risk' by HEFCE signifies that their achievements (below) represent excellent outcomes (SO1&3).

The College's HE student population can be divided into 4 main groups – (1) students studying a foundation year as a part an extended degree in Science, Computing and Mathematics (franchised from Kingston University – the group referred to above), (2) young undergraduates taking the opportunity of HE study with modest prior academic achievement (often in non A level qualifications) and from backgrounds with less exposure to, and experience of university study (some of whom progress from the College itself), (3) mature learners developing their careers by studying alongside employment with modest prior qualifications and/or a substantial time gap since the last experience of formal study and (4) students studying specialist and well recognised awards such as the BA (Hons) Acting for Stage and Media, BA (Hons) Integrative Relational Counselling and Teacher Education awards– some of whom may have higher entry qualifications.

7.3 Positive Outcomes for All (S03) - Final Year Award Data – year 2016/17

Table 3 below provides details of the outcomes of all of the College's HE students (directly and indirectly funded) in their award year (783 starters/ 701 achievements - 2016/17) and demonstrates a very good overall achievement rate of 90% with 45% of those achievements at higher grade level Distinction/First Class, Merit/Second Class Honours level. These students experienced all of their study at Kingston College. This represents an excellent performance in terms of achievement of student outcomes and distance travelled/learning gain, especially so when considering the entry point of the cohort, prior qualifications and past learning experience which in this case includes very low entry full- time Business students (UCAS entry points [old] 80 [new] 32 and mature learners on courses such Fda in Early Years Education and Business with modest prior academic achievement (in most cases is historic).(S01&O3)

College Direct/indirectly Funded courses	No. starts	No. achieved	% achieved	% high grades	*no. achievers due to award regs. unable to gain high grade (eg PGCE – pass only)
KC - Total	455	401	88	60	*16
CC - Total	125	115	92	41	*14
STC- Total	203	185	91	16	*28
STC Group - Total	**783**	**701**	**90**	**45**	***58**

Table 3 – South Thames Colleges Group-Award Year Achievement Profile 2016/17 (source ; Colleges' ILR 2015/16 submitted to HEFCE October 2017)(SO1&3)

7.4 Progression at lower levels of study, to employment and further study (SO1/2)

The TEF core metric for non-continuation which for full- time students reported at 83.8%, disappointingly 2.8% below the benchmark, does accurately and fairly demonstrate in TEF metric terms the College's performance in supporting students at lower and earlier stages of their HE journey. The metric does include the large Foundation Year Science, Computing and Maths provision and whilst being accurate does perhaps not fully recognise that the significant number of students on this course who, whilst being qualified in a range of L3 subjects the absence of the key subject study for this particular set of pathways presents additional and special challenges.

The most recent 2016/17 outcomes data presented above demonstrates the significant learning gain and distance travelled from modest starting points and provides evidence of (a) a very high proportion of all students, irrespective of their backgrounds achieving their educational goals and gaining positive outcomes (b) mature students studying alongside work achieving their professional goals(c) positive outcomes being achieved by those at risk of not fulfilling their objectives (S03).

The latest 2015/16 published DHLE data for the 2 parts of the College Group (table 4 below), which excludes the substantial numbers graduating from Kingston University having studied only for the Foundation Year at Kingston College (section 1.3), provides very positive evidence of students studying wholly at the College Group progressing into either employment or further study. The progression rates of students into work or further study (or a combination) who studied for their course exclusively at these 2 Colleges, was 96 % ,2 percentage points above the Group's core TEF metric "Employment of Further Study" and 2. 4 percentage points above the TEF benchmark. For consistency the College asserts that this data should be relied upon and not the core metrics due to the distortion factor of students with majority study time at the partner university. (SO1)

College	No. respondents	Working %	Working & Studying %	Studying %	Other %	Unemployed %	Positive destination %
KC	226	52	10	25	9	4	96
CC	85	46	21	26	5	2	98
STCG Total	311	**50**	13	25	8	4	96

Table 4 – South Thames Colleges Group DHLE Analysis 2015/16 leavers- occupation 6 months after graduation (source; i-graduate Jan 2017)SO1

It is disappointing that whole group data is not available. The enhanced HE processes resulting from merger sees 2016/17 data currently being collected by i-graduate for the whole group.

A significant proportion of the awards at the Colleges support progression to further study at either HND, or Full Honours Degree level. Examples of very positive progression are the suite of Fdas in Early Years Education (operating for 20 years) and Business (10 years). Significant numbers of Diplomats have progressed to the university partner to complete Top Ups. All set against modest past academic achievement and alongside the challenges of work and family life. (SO1/2/3). EE reports highlight the importance the given to preparing students for employment.(SO2)

BA Hons) Acting for Stage and Media	***FdA Fashion and Textiles***
There is a strong awareness of the needs of the industry and of what constitutes professional practice in performing arts. The commitment to the student experience from the staff team is a fundamental driving force of the successes on the	*The standard of work is outstanding for this group and it is clear that staff have succeeded in developing an energy and dynamic environment where students have*

programme.In assessment feedback that I saw, there were in many cases a very strong level of detail in regard to assessors responding directly to the assessment criteria.Feedback to students in the form of written feedback sheets is often detailed, supportive and comprehensive.	*produced exciting work. The titles and content of the projects is exciting, contemporary and allows students to relate directly to industry through the encouragement of market research.*

Executive summary

The newly merged South Thames Colleges' Group aims to maintain the Silver awarded to Kingston College (in June 2017 - TEF year 2 - awarded for 3 years). Kingston College is the successor College and the majority provider (70%) of HE in the merged college.

The Statement contains the same assertion as in the Kingston College Year 2 TEF application (which was acknowledged by TEF assessors in their statement of findings), that due to the large volume and still high proportion of learners studying on the Foundation Year in Science, Computing and Maths, who study for a minority of their time at the College (25%) but are captured within the College's TEF core, split and supplementary metrics, judgements should be made by reference to data about students whose study has been exclusively within the College Group.

This Statement has highlighted that the 2017 merger has already demonstrated the substantial potential for sharing of good practice, processes and support between the colleges (especially from the successor college). Whilst the colleges with smaller HE provision are already benefiting from the extension of effective and proven HE teaching, learning, assessment and quality structures, it should not be overlooked that these colleges in their own right have extensive histories in HE and successful engagement with HER and APR processes.

Above all South Thames Colleges' Group (also individual predecessor colleges) is a **learning and teaching** institution that welcomes a very diverse profile of students, supports excellent teaching, focuses upon learners, inclusion, social mobility and communities. The potential for enhancing its effectiveness as outlined in section 2 is undoubtedly already bearing fruit.

The Group's lecturers have teaching qualifications and substantial teaching experience leading to a strong emphasis on assessment practices and stretching students. CPD is a prominent activity in the College and continually promotes and supports teaching and assessment practice which lead to its excellent outcomes for the students. Student feedback supports the evidence for the high quality of teaching across the College. Many of the HE programmes, in are vocationally orientated with the assessment being directly in the context of the industry to which the students are destined.

The "Silver" characteristics of the successor College, Kingston, in the TEF year 2 assessors' statement of findings, are clearly evident 7 months later in the South Thames Colleges' Group;

- "*students from all backgrounds achieve excellent outcomes. The metrics indicate that very high proportions of students' progress to employment or further study, especially mature and BME students*
- *students' academic experiences tailored to the individual*
- *small group sizes*
- *pedagogical approaches specifically informed by the needs of a student body*
- *where almost all students (*80% of the newly merged College*) enter with low or non-tariff*
- *relatively high …and appropriate levels of contact time securing high levels of engagement and commitment to learning and study*
- *high quality dedicated space for HE students that supports learning,incl. specialist spaces"*
- *an embedded institutional culture that facilitates excellent teaching including through high numbers of staff with teaching qualifications".*