TEF YEAR THREE PROVIDER SUBMISSION

January 2018

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1 Boston College Context

Boston College is the only provider of higher education in the town of Boston and is Ofsted graded 'Good' with FE achievement rates that are at or above national averages across the board. A significant proportion of learners commence their studies with very low levels of prior attainment and as a result of extremely effective teaching and support, many achieve high grades in GCSE English and maths in addition to their vocational qualifications. During the HEFCE visit to the College on 28th November 2017, assessors noted that "*Students tend to come from local areas with low levels of HE participation, and therefore require more support to access, participate and succeed at HE level study*". Staff at the College are very good at supporting students from non-traditional backgrounds to achieve their potential, and this is evident from the 2017 NSS with 100% of respondents being satisfied with the overall quality of their courses. The quality of teaching, learning environment, student outcomes and learning gain are believed to merit at least a silver standard award on the TEF, particularly when the metrics are considered in the context in which the College operates.

Boston College mainly serves the borough of Boston and the districts of South Holland and East Lindsey although its geographical reach is wider than this. The areas are characterised by a low skill, low wage economy and consequently high levels of deprivation and rural poverty. The College is the third most rural in the country which poses a number of challenges to its work. Boston is the 66th most deprived area in the country with 19.6% of people living in the most deprived areas (an increase of 2.8% since 2010). This compares with East Lindsey ranked 33 (with 29.8% of the population in the most deprived areas) and South Holland ranked 134 (IMD 2015). The State of the Nation Report 2017 noted that Boston and two other towns in East Midlands have the fewest residents in professional and managerial jobs in the whole of England. As a result, average wages in these areas are low and 28% of residents earn below the voluntary living wage – the worst rates in the country.

Boston College plays an important role in the life of the town and makes a significant contribution to the local economy in a number of ways. Offering in excess of 400 courses, it has more than 6000 students over the age of 14 and employs over 450 staff. It works closely with local businesses to help meet their skills needs and has established a reputation as being at the forefront of new developments. It makes a major contribution to the local community and is wholly committed to the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion. It is a college that transforms people's lives and has aspirations to be outstanding. Designated areas of growth in the short to medium term are apprenticeships and Higher Education. One of the Lincolnshire Enterprise Partnership (LEP) priority sectors, as outlined in the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership (GLLEP) Strategic Economic Plan, is engineering and manufacturing and the College

is working to address the impending skills shortages in this area and has plans to build a new centre for Engineering, Manufacturing and Technology which will be part funded by the GLLEP. The College will continue to offer a broad and varied curriculum at level 3 and below in order to ensure that there is adequate choice for learners in the area.

Boston has had a significant increase in skilled and semi-skilled migrant workers from Central and Eastern Europe. Overall, Lincolnshire's non British population increased from approximately 27,000 in 2011 to around 50,900 by 2017. The number of National Insurance numbers being issued to non UK adults in Boston is the highest in Lincolnshire, more than double that of Lincoln City and 1700 more than South Holland, and has risen year on year. However, in 2016, 1000 more people left Boston than moved here. Eastern European students make up nearly 30% of the College's learner population which contrasts with the fact that 93% of Lincolnshire is White British. In meeting the needs of the rapidly changing demographic in Boston, the College's curriculum is continually reviewed and developed to ensure that it is highly responsive to local requirements and the promotion of community cohesion is proactively and successfully undertaken.

Lincolnshire is one of the most important counties for agricultural and horticultural production and food processing is a key industry. Other important local sectors include Health & Social Care, Retail, Tourism, Manufacturing, Construction, Public Administration and Education. The Third Sector is also important to the county and includes 25,000 volunteers who make a vital contribution within the community. The unemployment rate in Lincolnshire remained below both the regional and national rates throughout 2016 and 2017. Although the overall unemployment rate is low, the proportion of unemployed young people aged 16-24 in Lincolnshire is 4% of the resident population of the same age compared with 2.8% nationally. The county has specific challenges in relation to graduate opportunities and many young graduates choose to move to other parts of the country once they are qualified.

The county remains in the bottom five performing areas in the country in terms of gross value added although the 'per person' rate has increased over the last year to 75% of that of England as a whole. Business sparsity is an issue with 88.8% of businesses employing 10 or fewer people and the minority (less than 1%) having more than 200 employees. Low aspiration, low skill and qualification levels continue to be a problem in the area. The proportion of working age people with NVQ4 or above in Boston is 13.5% (Dec 2016), a decline of 2 percentage points compared to the 2011 data and significantly lower than the Lincolnshire figure of 27.5% (2016 Annual Population Survey).

The GCSE English and maths as well as the English Baccalaureate attainment levels of school leavers in Boston are the lowest in the county.

GCSE in English and maths A - C*

Lincolnshire	*62.3%*
Boston	*54.08%*
South Holland	*59.26%*

English Baccalaureate

Lincolnshire	*28.1%*
Boston	*19.58%*
South Holland	*22.45%*

Data Source: Lincolnshire Research Observatory
http://www.research-lincs.org.uk/LROPresentationTools/UI/Pages/MappingTool.aspx

Within Lincolnshire there are skills shortages in construction and manufacturing and generally in relation to the recruitment of professional occupations and managers/directors. The Greater Lincolnshire LEP has stated that the county's priority sectors are agri-food, manufacturing and the visitor economy. Other important sectors are health & care, low carbon and port and logistics.

Boston College Vision and Values:

"*To be a brilliant college that transforms people's lives and makes an outstanding contribution to the economy of Greater Lincolnshire by working in partnership with employers and other key stakeholders*"

Boston College strategic priorities: 2017-2020

- To ensure that teaching, learning and assessment are of the highest quality and lead to excellent student outcomes
- To raise aspirations, provide effective support and secure high levels of progression into employment and further or higher education
- To drive the skills agenda within Lincolnshire, engaging with employers and the community to develop an outstanding reputation for meeting local and regional skills needs
- To develop our business whilst maintaining financial stability
- To set high expectations for all our staff and foster a culture of continuous improvement and innovation in a supportive environment
- To advance equality, diversity and inclusion so that it is central to our college culture

The College views the provision of HE as a vital component in realising its vision, with widening participation being at the heart of the College's FE and HE ethos. As well as maintaining and diversifying the range of income sources available to the College and improving public perceptions of its provision, HE provides a framework within which it can

address the local and regional skills agenda and raise the aspirations of both staff and students.

HE at the College also fulfills a crucial role in meeting the needs of the local community. Alternative HE provision is situated in the cities of Lincoln and Peterborough but given the rural location and dispersed population, potential students find the cost and time commitment for travel prohibitive, (both cities are a 2 hour round trip by road). As the main provider of further education locally, the College creates a market for higher education through its wide portfolio of level 3 programmes. This includes the traditional A level and BTEC programmes as well as successful Access to Higher Education courses for mature students, and the advanced apprenticeships in areas such as Supporting Teaching and Learning in Schools (STLS) and Early Years which provide an alternative route into teaching.

Higher Education Strategy objectives 2017-2020

- Objective 1: Expand the College's employer focused HE provision
- Objective 2: Increase HE participation in the South Lincolnshire region
- Objective 3: To ensure HE students at Boston College have a high quality, affordable learning experience
- Objective 4: To ensure that the resourcing of HE supports the growth and expansion of high quality provision
- Objective 5: To ensure that there are HE relevant professional development opportunities open to all staff teaching and supporting HE students

The Greater Lincolnshire Area Review Report (DfE, 2017) process concluded that "Boston College will remain as a stand-alone institution acting as a key provider of general technical education serving the town of Boston and surrounding rural areas" (Greater Lincolnshire Area Review Report, 2017, p. 24). The College's 'strong balance sheet' and financial position supported the recommendation to stand-alone.

2 Teaching Quality

The provision of high quality learning and teaching is the College's core business across all aspects of the provision. Key external evaluations on the performance of the College are positive and the QAA HE Review in 2014 highlighted as good practice, '*The College's arrangements for supporting and fostering high quality teaching and learning and the positive impact this has on the student learning experience'*. The College was reaffirmed as a 'good' provider by Ofsted in its short

inspection in November 2017 with the report stating that *'Most teaching, learning and assessment are good or better*'.

The TEF 2017 metrics for teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support are all above benchmark, significantly so in the case of two of these aspects. The College's internal HE student survey of 2017 identified similar trends in terms of student satisfaction to the NSS survey.

Ongoing improvement of teaching, learning and assessment is an integral part of the College's practice. Observations of teaching practice occur throughout the academic year to assure quality, identify individual and team training needs and highlight areas of best practice. The observation process has been developed into a Quality Monitoring Review (QMR); this process incorporates a holistic review of teaching, learning and assessment within each programme area of the College. Within the QMR a range of methods are applied to develop an understanding of the students' learning experience. For example, focus groups with students studying HE follow themes that are aligned to the QAA Codes of Practice, part B (Assuring and Enhancing Academic Quality). Students are asked to reflect upon aspects such the support to develop their academic skills, the way in which resources support their learning and the role of feedback in helping them to improve. Outcomes from the QMR process enables the College to review the actions taken in response to feedback and ensure that they lead to improvement.

All of the methods used during the QMR feed into a final report for each programme area which highlights the strengths and areas for improvement. Higher Education Course Coordinators within programme areas draw upon the outcomes of the QMR, staff development and internal and external survey results when they are gathering evidence for the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR). Programme area AMRs are completed at the end of each academic year and enable the teaching teams to review the students' experience and set out the aims for the following academic year within a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP).

Areas for improvement are addressed through a range of strategies, for example, through the College's staff development programme, individual staff members attending conferences, or bespoke training. Staff at the College usually teach across both further and higher education and the College values staff development that improves student experience at all levels of the provision. Bespoke staff development for lecturers teaching across the HE portfolio is provided and staff have attended development on using journals within teaching and Learning, developing online Moodle Tutorial Pages and global support sessions for Higher Nationals. Alongside these generic staff development sessions, a more specialised staff development programme has been planned around teaching research. All programmes of study contain a research module and focused staff

development has enabled staff to come together to share approaches and standardise practice in line with sector best practice for research.

Teaching, learning and assessment is also developed through external training opportunities, and this can be via subject sector conference or a longer term investment by the College supporting staff to gain higher level qualifications. In 2017 the College has further committed to the development of the teaching staff through joining the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and there is structured programme of development to support teaching and support staff through the Fellowship programme.

The College underwent institutional revalidation in 2017 with a HEI, and the commendations included the following:

- *"the support networks provided by the College and it commends the College's nurturing approach to its students and staff"*
- *"The College's recognition and promotion of CPD opportunities for those delivering Higher Education programmes"*

The November 2017 Ofsted inspection report states that '*Teachers make good use of a wide range of professional development opportunities and a team of advanced practitioners provides continuing support that leads to improvements'*.

3 Learning Environment

Boston College has a dedicated HE Centre at its Rochford campus and this is well equipped for classroom delivery and independent study. It includes recreational space for HE students although they also have full access to all the facilities available to FE students. Specialist resources are provided in areas such as sport, music and performing arts and in 2013 a new library was built with excellent IT facilities and study areas. The library contains an English language support centre to provide academic writing assistance to advanced and higher level students for whom English is a second language.

The College pays close attention to student satisfaction levels and from outcomes of both the College and NSS surveys, it was evident that the student experience could be improved in two areas relating to the learning environment. The NSS survey highlighted to the College that student satisfaction for learning resources (including online) was 81% against a sector average of 85%, and the outcomes from the College internal survey student satisfaction indicated that 11% of students were dissatisfied with library resources.

Prior to the start of the 2017/18 academic year, actions were undertaken to address these issues and increase learner satisfaction in relation to library and online learning resources. Library staff have therefore produced a detailed guide for students about the support and guidance that is provided by the library during their studies. A range of study skills sessions and supporting material, differentiated for level 4 and level 5, were also developed by the library staff. Workshops included critical thinking, referencing, academic assessment and developing wider reading skills. Students and teaching staff can select relevant workshops to attend throughout the academic year. These are delivered by a dedicated member of library staff and to date the feedback from the students about the workshops has been positive.

Online support study support via the College's VLE (Moodle) has been developed to offer a richer variety of supporting material for learning for the students when they are off campus. Students can now access academic writing support, links to websites about career progression and study skills techniques such as managing deadlines and effective note taking.

4 Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

The College focuses the management of all the HE provision on students' experience, their outcomes and support for the development of their skills and knowledge in preparation for life and work. The management structure is designed to ensure that all aspects of practice are monitored and changes implemented so that the College is continually improving the student holistic learning experience. In 2017 the College undertook a management restructure to ensure there was a clear reporting framework and appropriate roles and resources to assist the management and development of the HE portfolio.

The structure includes an HE Group with an operational role which supports staff to engage in the development of the HE provision at the College. Staff have the opportunity to share teaching and learning experiences with their peers in a cross college forum. This group promotes sharing of best practice to ensure there is consistency across HE provision. Scrutiny of policy and process occurs at the HE Quality Assurance Committee (QAC), and this committee includes a student representative to ensure the voice of the students is part of the checks and balances within the quality system process. The Standards Committee receives an Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) and scrutinises the performance of the College's HE provision. The AMR draws upon external and internal indicators to review HE at the College, and after ratification at Corporation, a Quality Improvement Plan is implemented to drive improvements within the next academic year.

The HE curriculum in 2016/17 was comprised of the following programmes:

- HND/C in Business
- HNC in Travel and Tourism Management
- HND/C Computing and Systems Development
- HNC in Performing Arts (Performance)
- HND/C in Sport and Exercise Science
- HND/C in Applied Biology
- HND/C Music
- Foundation Degree Applied Studies (Early Childhood)
- Foundation Degree Applied Studies (Learning Support)

The number of students completing HE qualifications has increased incrementally each academic year. Retention (continuation) rates have improved significantly over a 5 year period as a result of targeted quality improvement actions and for students due to complete in the 2017/18 academic year, the retention rate is excellent at 97%.

Table 1 - Higher Education Achievement Rates
Data Source: Pro Achieve January 2018; Note: The achievement rate is the percentage of students who were retained and passed their course

End Year	Enrolments	% Retention	%Pass	% Achievement
13/14	79	75%	98%	**73%**
14/15	84	77%	94%	**73%**
15/16	109	88%	91%	**80%**
16/17	127	86%	94%	**80%**
17/18	119	97%		

Attainment 2016/17	No. Grade	% Grade
Distinction	22	22%
Merit	22	22%
Pass	58	57%
Total Achieved	102	

A significant proportion of the College's HE students are adults (33% of the current cohort are aged over 25) and are non-traditional entrants with vocational experience as opposed to academic qualifications. In order to bridge the gap between prior attainment and level 4 study, at the start of each academic year students are invited to attend a Higher Education Study Event which introduces them to the learning, teaching and support structures at the College. Students are welcomed onto their HE learning journey by the Principal and the full range of support systems are outlined. These include welfare, counselling and impartial careers advice and guidance. Students attend a range of workshops, which address topics including: understanding referencing and

avoiding plagiarism: academic writing: study skills: and critical thinking. The event has been very well received by the students and comments from the 2017 event include:

"*Feel confident to start the course".*

"Confident now have tools to start the course"

"Feel ready for course but a big step and a very different way of learning"

"Looking forward to learning"

"Really helpful day"

Academic and pastoral support is an integral part of learning, teaching and student experience at Boston College, and over 50% of students that are currently studying HE have undertaken a previous qualification at the College. It is their experience on previous qualifications at the College which motivates them to continue their learning journey. Students remain at the College to study HE for a variety of reasons. Some students want to study and work, others do not feel ready to leave home and study at a large higher education institution (HEI) and some lack confidence and seek the security, familiarity and high quality learning that the College can offer them. Therefore the staff at the College have an excellence understanding of their students from the outset and are able to support them effectively through the transition from FE to HE. The ethos of teaching and learning for HE at the College is to nurture the learning talent with academic and pastoral support so that students leaving their studies and have gained skills, knowledge and ability to progress to a degree or to gain more highly skilled employment with higher wage earning capacity. The outcomes from the National Student Survey (NSS) in 2017 highlighted that students at Boston College are very positive about their learning experiences, and the nurturing ethos is well received by them.

The National Student Survey (NSS) 2017

- 93% of the students were satisfied with the teaching against a sector average of 85%
- 93% of the students were satisfied with assessment and feedback against a sector average of 73%
- 98% of students were satisfied with the academic support they received against a sector average of 80%.
- 92% satisfaction with learning opportunities against a sector average of 84%
- 100% of the students were satisfied with the overall quality of their course against a sector average of 84%

The College applies a range of tools to monitor student satisfaction including external surveys (NSS) and internal feedback mechanisms. For example, students complete Module Evaluation Forms (MEF), at the end of each learning module. The feedback from the MEF enables teaching

staff to have an understanding about the students' learning experiences throughout the academic year, and the staff are able reflect and adapt upon their pedagogical approaches proactively within the academic year. Students receive feedback from their MEF via a system of "You Said, We Did"- which summarises the key themes that arose from the MEF, and the actions, if any, that have been taken. The "You Said We Did" feedback is shared with students via HE subject noticeboards. Further to the MEF the College also undertakes internal student surveys as another formal method for understanding the students' learning experience. The HE student survey of 2017 identified similar trends to the NSS survey.

College Internal HE Survey 2017

- 96% of the students were satisfied with the teaching
- 97% of students were satisfied with the advice and guidance
- 98% of the students were satisfied with the overall quality of their course

The College also scrutinises the outcomes from the Destination of Leavers of HE (DLHE) survey. In 2017 the DLHE survey highlighted that the majority of students were in employment or further study after completing their qualification at the College. Although the performance at the College for employment or further study is 0.4% below sector benchmark, the variable between fulltime and part time modes of study places the College 4.3% above benchmark for employment or further study for students on part time study. Currently all the College's HE provision is offered at level 4 and 5. It is evident from the NSS and College survey that students have a very positive learning experience during their studies at the College, but the variables that operate beyond the influences of the College have had an impact upon student progression to employment and further study.

For students to continue their studies they need to commit to travelling to the nearest HEI, or leave home to study. In an area of low wage, high level of deprivation and rurality travel complexities the continuation of studies are not insignificant for students. To address this the College works closely with local HEIs to remove barriers, for example, altering timetables to enable students to attend HEI Top Up progression events. Support is offered to complete UCAS applications, and impartial advice and guidance given about career pathways and range of qualifications at HEIs. The College is one of nine institutions in Lincolnshire working in partnership as part of the National Collaborative Outreach Programme (NCOP) and this enables the College to support young people to improve access to HE. Collectively there is a focus upon promoting and engaging young people with opportunities to study HE.

Boston College's TEF metric for progression to highly skilled employment is below benchmark but as mentioned previously, this is related to external factors beyond the College's control. Highly

skilled employment opportunities within Boston and the surrounding area have been highlighted in the State of the Nation report, 2017 as low. However, there are some sectors where students can obtain skilled employment. The teaching profession is a highly skilled workforce and the College supports this sector through the foundation degrees' pathways. Nevertheless, students that want to enter the teaching profession have an additional two year learning journey prior to them gaining highly skilled employment. For example, students from the foundation degree pathways who progress to a BA (Hons) Education or BA (Hons) Primary Education with QTS are moving into highly skilled employment, two years post their studies at the College, and students that have studied their foundation degree at Boston College are now qualifying as teachers and joining the profession. Therefore these outcomes are not reflected in the DLHE survey as they occur two years after completion of HE studies at Boston College.

5 Summary

Higher Education is highly valued by the students and staff at Boston College. As this submission has identified, the College has an important role within the local community and its HE portfolio is supporting the local area to address a qualification and skills shortage. The future of HE at the College is ambitious and exciting. Growth opportunities within the next two academic years will see the HE portfolio at the College expand into high level technical education for delivery in its new Engineering, Manufacturing and Technology (EMAT) Centre. This will lead to closer working relationships with employers and develop opportunities for a highly skilled workforce within the local area. Boston Borough Council was been awarded a £1.39 million bid to advance community cohesion within the town and the College will play a pivotal role in supporting the local economy. Internal and external indicators highlight that the College is offering high quality teaching, learning and academic support to students, and this will continue to be a key focus going forward. Public recognition of the quality of local HE provision in the form of a silver or higher TEF award would send a positive message to prospective students and employers about the opportunities for high level skills development within the Boston area.