TEF Year Four provider submission

Provider Context

Introduction

The aim of this submission is to demonstrate the progress that South Essex College is making towards being a high quality inclusive provider of Higher Education in one of the most challenging areas of the country. Since 2015, fundamental structural, pedagogical and attitudinal change has taken place at the College with the aim of fulfilling its HE mission:

> "To offer outstanding HE provision that is at the forefront of sector expectations meets graduate employer needs, equips students to start their career, engage in further study or professional development and serves the local, regional and wider economies." (Higher Education Strategy 2017-20)

The submission will describe the impact of existing initiatives on the student academic experience in the College's University Centre, and how in future years the College expects to see an impact of these initiatives on the aspects of quality outlined in the TEF assessment criteria.

The College context

South Essex College is a large general further education college. It was formed in 2010 by the merger of two Colleges[1] and has become established as the main provider of college-based vocational education in the predominantly urban south Essex region. The College's HE provision is based predominantly at one campus in Southend-On-Sea, with delivery of one degree programme in Purfleet and two Pearson BTEC HNC part-time programmes at Grays campus in Thurrock. The College gained directly funded HEFCE student numbers in 2013. Current HE programmes are validated by University of Essex (UoE), University of the Arts London (UAL), University of East Anglia (UEA), The Open University (The OU) and Pearson.

The College strives to deliver high quality HE provision to the local communities it serves, the demographic of which is comprised mainly of those least likely to progress to higher education and who reside in the most deprived postcodes. This student demographic has remained stable for the last three years across POLAR Quintiles 1, 2 and 3 and National IMD Quintiles 1 to 5, as evidenced by the College's contextual data in TEF 2, 3 and 4 and which is presented in Tables 1 and 2 below. The intersections of disadvantage, as originally outlined in the Access and Participation Plan 2019-20 remain profound in the TEF 4 metrics and individualised student data sets, with high representation of mature students and those with disabilities on full-time undergraduate programmes relative to HESA benchmarks and national rates.

		Full-time (2015-16)		Full-time (2016-17)		Full-time (2017-18)	
		Headcount	%	Headcount	%	Headcount	%
POLAR	Quintile: 1	184	35%	190	38%	180	38%
	2	163	31%	160	31%	155	33%
	3	100	19%	85	17%	100	21%
	4	65	12%	55	10%	25	5%
	5	21	4%	20	4%	10	2%

Table 1: Full-time HE student POLAR Quintiles 1 to 5 from 2015-16 to 2017-18

		Full-time (2015-16)		Full-time (2016-17)		Full-time (2017-18)	
		Headcount	%	Headcount	%	Headcount	%
National IMD	Quintile: 1			195	24%	180	24%
	2			220	27%	210	28%
	3			150	18%	125	16%

[1] *Thurrock and Basildon College and South East Essex College*

	4			130	16%	120	16%
	5			135	16%	120	16%

Table 2: Full-time HE student National IMD Quintiles 1 to 5 in 2016-17 and 2017-18

BAME student participation was above the local area population percentage for 'Black' and 'Other' categories in 2016-17 and 2017-18, as noted in Table 3 below, but below that for the 'Asian' category. This in part is likely to be due to the HE programme offer, which is in the process of being expanded to subject areas where BAME participation rates tend to be relatively high.

		Southend-on-Sea Census 2011 data	Full-time (2016-17)		Full-time (2017-18)	
			Headcount	%	Headcount	%
Ethnicity	White	92%	710	85%	660	86%
	Black	2%	50	6%	40	5%
	Asian	4%	25	3%	20	2%
	Other	1%	40	5%	40	5%

Table 3: Full-time HE BAME participation rates in 2016-17 and 2017-18 relative to local demographic as at 2011

The majority of the College's full-time HE students hold medium, low or non-tariff qualifications on entry, as evidenced by Table 4 below, which traditionally are seen to impact on other student outcomes, including final degree classifications and destinations on graduation. In relation to the latter, 7% were noted as being self-employed/self-assessed by the LEO data in the TEF 4 metrics (which is not included in the DLHE data used in the TEF 4 metrics for (highly skilled) employment or further study). The move to NewDLHE, which includes coverage of self-employment and an increase of survey times from 6 to 15 months following graduation is to be welcomed, since it is likely to take account of some of the lack of socio-economic mobility affecting the graduates with the above intersections of disadvantage, resulting in a longer lead time for them to progress to further study or (self-) employment / highly skilled employment.

		Full-time (2015-16)		Full-time (2016-17)		Full-time (2017-18)	
		Headcount	%	Headcount	%	Headcount	%
Entry qualifications	HE-level			70	9%	75	10%
	High tariff	64	7%	80	10%	95	13%
	Medium tariff	189	21%	195	23%	185	24%
	Low tariff	312	35%	300	36%	265	35%
	Non-tariff	325	37%	180	22%	140	19%

Table 4: Full-time HE student entry tariff profile from 2015-16 to 2017-18

An outline of the key changes since November 2015

In the period between 2015 and 2017 significant changes were made to leadership and management of Higher Education centrally within the College. These included:

1. The engagement of a Head of HE Development and Delivery (interim) (in 11/2015)
2. The appointment of a Dean of Higher Education (in 01/2017)
3. The appointment of a team focussed on improving the quality of the student academic experience by implementing the new strategies and initiatives (in 2017 onwards).

The impact of the changes above were that in April 2017, negotiations were under way with two validating partners (The OU and UEA) to replace UoE, which had given notice in July 2016 to terminate the long-standing partnership and run-off its validated programmes with the College. In June 2017, the Head of HE Development and Delivery (interim) successfully led on drafting and submitting the documentation for the QAA HER partial re-review, with oversight from the HE

Committee, which led to a successful Review outcome in July 2017, amending the previous Review judgements accordingly. The Dean of Higher Education, the Head of HE Development and Delivery (interim) and an external consultant, with substantial senior level experience from the university sector, worked on the submission documentation for institutional approval with UEA and The OU. This included substantial repositioning of structures, systems, strategies, policies and procedures associated with HE development and delivery at the College as part of the institutional approval submission, also including, but not limited to, the formation by August 2018 of a Faculty of Higher Education, reduced contact hours for HE Programme Leaders and HE Lecturers (but maintaining overall teaching hours for students), sustainable student growth, with increased investment in staff development and learning resources, a staff to student ratio of 1:20 to 1:25 in order to maintain teaching intensity and a closer working relationship with UEA. A new position was created as part of the institutional approval: Head of HE Strategic Quality and Outcomes (interim), which the Head of HE Development and Delivery (interim) moved into so as to maintain the momentum of changes to quality assurance. Both institutional approvals were successful, with a number of commendations and some conditions and recommendations. In January 2018, HEFCE undertook an APR follow-up meeting with the College to monitor progress on the action plan and student retention, the outcome of which was positive.

During the academic year 2017-18, there were nine successful programme validations, six with UEA and three with UAL, which contributed to a spike in capital expenditure in 2017-18 of £209,000. The programme validations included greater investment in learning resources, embedding of work-related learning and a greater focus on the student academic experience. In addition, the Access Agreement for 2018-19 included ring-fenced tuition fee increases to be used for continuous improvement of the student academic experience (totalling £123,500 for 2018-19 for Year 1 students only). This was on top of the standard 25% above £6,165 HE tuition fee income in the Access Agreement.

Since 2017, widening participation has played an increasingly important role, initially with the appointment of a HE Practice Learning Coordinator, supported by a practice learning consultant and more recently with the appointment of a HE Widening Participation Officer and further posts (see below) to address in part the negative flagged split metrics for destinations and supported by substantial investment into associated projects. These initial measures respond to the needs of the student demographic the College attracts and is informed by the mission in the HE Strategy 2017-20. The use of TEF metrics to inform the continuous improvement of the student academic experience and in turn the HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy should result in further enhancements to diversity and inclusive practice in programme delivery and increased granularity in related strategic and operational initiatives.

In November 2018, the College was registered with the OfS with no specific ongoing conditions, although enhanced monitoring arrangements have been imposed by the OfS and are being action planned accordingly. Further improvements are under way, including greater investment in HE, underpinned by a Faculty of HE (see Diagram 1 below), which is distinct from FE, with virtually all full-time HE programmes based within the Faculty of HE rather than distributed, as was previously the case, among departments that delivered both FE and HE, often with little management expertise in HE and/or the sub-structure to manage programmes within the new regulatory landscape. All future OfS regulated HE provision will reside in the Faculty of HE in order to underpin continued improvements to the TEF metrics.

The student voice has informed minor modifications to modules and units for several years albeit to varying degrees while in FE-HE departmental structures; and since 2017 has been used more extensively in programme redesign as evidenced by the nine programme validations in 2017-18 following the appointment of the Dean of HE and the move towards a Faculty of HE.

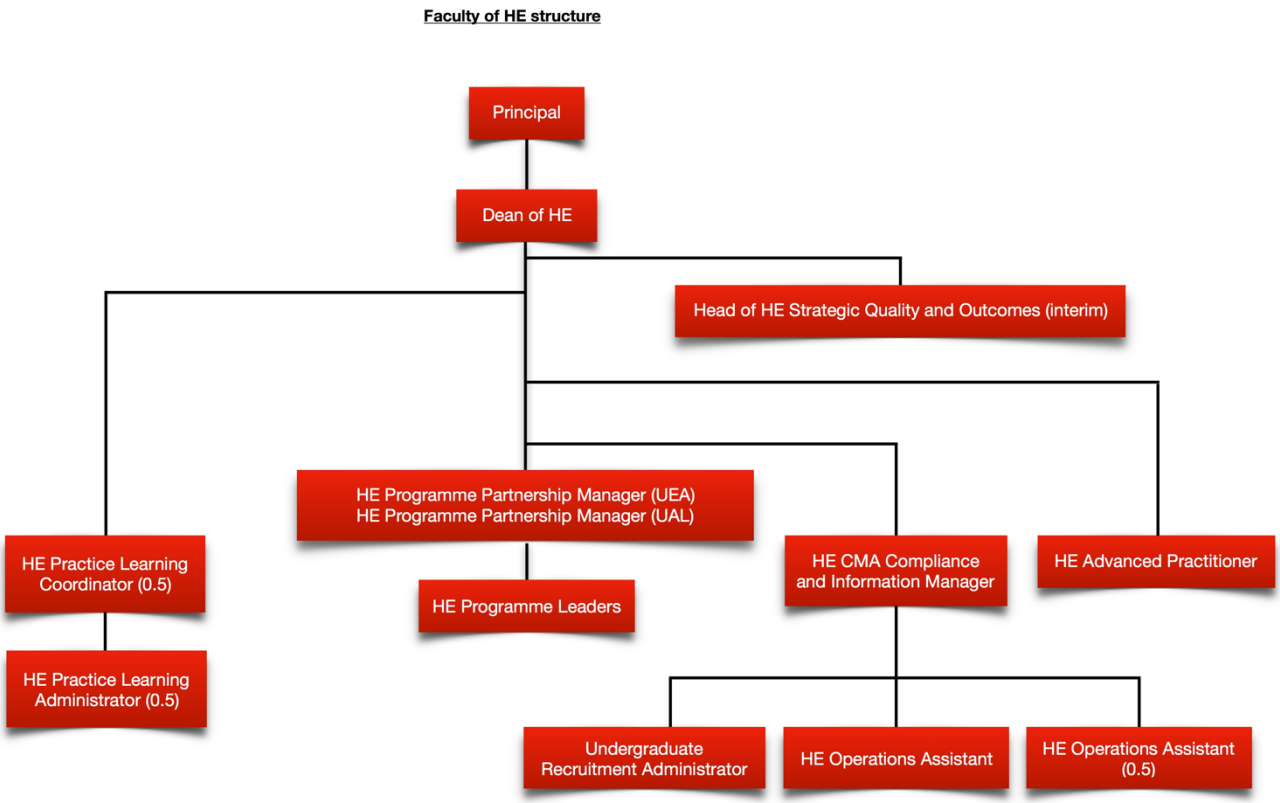


Diagram 1: Faculty of HE Structure (as at January 2019)

The move to a Faculty of HE, underpinned by the other changes noted in this submission, has resulted in an amplification and more consistent response to the student voice and re-enforcement of students as partners and co-creators in their learning. At a structural level, student representatives are encouraged to have "coffee with the Dean" to discuss any HE related matters affecting HE students; student representatives engage with Programme Boards (see further below), which are chaired by the Head of HE Strategic Quality and Outcomes (interim) (often with the Dean of HE, Programme Partnership Managers and Programme Leaders present) and can approach HE Programme Leaders directly (and are encouraged to do so) (as can students generally). This level of access to all levels of the Faculty of HE hierarchy increases transparency and recognises the importance of students as customers, partners and co-creators.

Teaching Quality

Student Engagement

Students are actively engaged in their studies, with Programme Leaders and Lecturers ensuring that students receive a good student academic experience, with small class sizes (approximately 20 students per class), high staff to student ratios (maintaining them at 1:20 or 1:25 or higher in some cases, e.g. 1:10), relatively high contact teaching hours compared to the higher education institution (HEI) sector norm, guest lectures from sector specialists, student alumni, employers and professionals from relevant disciplines. Students are also provided with workshops, inductions in each year of study to ensure and assure a smooth transition at each level of their programme and, more recently, social activities to introduce students to the HE ethos and distinctive experience, underpinned by the HE Strategy 2017-20 and the institutional level NSS report and action plan for 2018. The dedication of the programme teams in delivering high quality sessions has been echoed in External Examiner reports across several HE programmes, with a sample of comments in 2017-18 noting that: "[t]he teaching team are very proactive in developing the module content and assignment briefs and they encourage students to be creative and diverse in their work, this is

evident in the work the students produce." (BA (Hons) Fashion Design); "[t]he running, organisation and delivering of the course is an excellent example of good practice in the sector." (BA (Hons) Fine Art); "[t]his remains a comprehensive program which provides a range of interesting elements which allows students to develop innovative approaches to counselling thereby enabling them to develop specialism for their work as practitioners." (BA (Hons) Counselling); and "[t]he enthusiasm and high level of skills that the students have developed and the vocational expertise of the teaching staff was reflected in the variety of work witnessed by the External Examiner" (Pearson BTEC HND in Performing Arts). This in part explains the positive flag in the split metrics across POLAR Quintiles 1 & 2 for "The teaching on my course" and the absence across the entirety of that metric of negative flags.

Programme Boards were established in 2016-17 for each HE programme, with associated meetings held with Programme Leaders and student representatives (who are engaged as partners and co-creators in their learning) in order to increase the focus on each programme, an approach that was missing from the previous Programme Area Boards, which met with a cluster of HE programmes and their representatives in each meeting, often resulting in inconsistent student engagement across the programmes represented.

This approach ensures that issues are identified and remedial action taken in an expedient manner and at an appropriate level (i.e. programme level, portfolio level, Faculty level or escalated to institutional level via the HE Committee, chaired by the Principal and whose membership includes some HE Programme Leaders, Programme Partnership Managers, the Head of HE Strategic Quality and Outcomes (interim) and the Dean of Higher Education). The Programme Boards meet once a term. Since 2016-17, the Programme Boards have been refined twice (first in 2017-18 and again in 2018-19) following evaluative feedback from student representatives, students and Programme Leaders, with a view to increasing student engagement, co-creation and amplifying the student voice. This has been complemented by the appointment at the start of 2017-18 of a Student Engagement Facilitator, responsible for increasing student engagement with quality assurance and the College's Students Union, encouraging student representation and raising the profile of the student voice.

The continuous improvement of the student academic experience is informed by stakeholder feedback and involvement and embedded at a strategic level, as evidenced by the HE Enhancement and Continuous Improvement Strategy 2017-20 and supplemented by the HE Student Support Strategy, ensuring effective and timely student support, which has been repeatedly acknowledged by external stakeholders as good practice (including the QAA at the last HER, validating partners, such as The OU and UEA during institutional approval in 2017 and the Matrix report 2018). Continuous improvement is also a feature of the Access Agreements 2017-18, 2018-19 and the Access and Participation Plan 2019-20. These elements have contributed to maintaining and, in some cases, improving the percentage of First Class degrees and Upper Second Class degrees achieved across a range of student characteristics, albeit significantly below the national rates noted by HESA.

The College is currently in the process of seeking exemptions from accountancy bodies for its recently validated BSc (Hons) Accounting and Finance degree, which has content that is aligned predominantly to ACCA (Papers F1 to F9) and to a lesser extent to CIMA, ICAEW and CIPFA. Once such exemptions are gained, this is likely to improve graduate entry into the accounting and finance related professions.

In 2017-18, the College invested in purchasing, subscribing to and implementing *Canvas*, a new VLE platform for HE students to replace Moodle. This was fully rolled out in early 2018-19 and has been welcomed by student representatives (at Programme Boards) and staff alike for increasing student engagement and improving the student academic experience. At present it is too early to assess the impact this has had.

The Faculty of HE has academic staff that are suitably qualified, experienced and undertaking professional activity and professional development, as indicated by Table 5 below.

Qualifications held		Teaching qualifications		Academic Development		Relevant sector experience		Research	
Ph. D:	5	Held:	46	Enrolled on Master's Degree:	4	Currently practising:	24	Related current research	8
Master's Degree:	18	Working towards:	5			2+ years of relevant industry experience (but not currently practising):	16		

Table 5: Faculty of HE full-time academic staff profile at a glance

Valuing Teaching

A collegiate and collaborative approach is encouraged within the Faculty of HE; and since 2017-18, the terms of engagement for Programme Leaders and Lecturers in HE have been distinctive to their FE counterparts, seeking to move closer over time to the HE sector norm (although it is recognised that there is some way to go). For instance, Programme Leaders and Lecturers in HE have clearly defined roles; and in 2017-18 contact teaching hours for Programme Leaders were reduced from 22 hours to 16 hours in order to improve programme management, promotion and preparation. Lecturers had their contact hours reduced from 24 to 20 and in 2018-19 this has been further reduced to 18 so that they have more time to prepare for sessions, maintain the currency of programme content and delivery and ensure effective and timely assessment and feedback.

With relatively small HE student numbers and a shallow structure, progression opportunities within the Faculty of HE are limited and there are as yet no direct financial benefits for excellent teaching. However, in 2018-19, the College agreed to provide more development opportunities to Programme Leaders, commencing with the financing of 75% of the tuition fees associated with a Master's Degree programme that has some relationship with the programme being delivered, with a view to further improving the content delivered. So far, five applications for Master's Degrees commencing in 2018-19 have been accepted.

In addition, the College is working closely with its validating partners to deliver a range of CPD and training activities. In 2017-18, these included: UEA research ethics training, UAL assessment training (standardisation event), UEA partnership conference, and HE peer observation, while in 2018-19 these have to date (January 2019) included: UAL teaching exchange and UAL ethics training.

The commitment to increased investment in staff development and library and online learning resources (approximately 2% and 3% of net HE tuition fee income respectively[2]) is starting to reflect positively in Programme Boards with student representatives requesting fewer learning resources and being more complimentary of the new resources that have been allocated, while increased staff development has resulted in more sharing of good practice and increased opportunities to innovate in delivery. This is also the case where academic staff have been released to undertake scholarly activity; for instance, presenting papers to an external audience in the UK and Europe aligned to their Ph.D, which they can then use to inform student dissertation research, identify relevant post-graduate options for their students and enhance session delivery.

Until 2016-17, lesson observations were undertaken by senior management on a similar basis to that carried out in FE; these fed into performance monitoring of lecturing staff. In 2017-18, a

[2] Net HE tuition fee income is calculated as follows: Gross HE tuition fee income *less* annual validating partner fees and *less* annual ring-fenced money.

dedicated HE peer observation scheme was introduced, and from 2018-19 lesson observations are being conducted by an Advanced Practitioner (HE) and overseen by the Dean of HE and Programme Partnership Managers. In 2017-18, UAL undertook lesson observations of their validated programmes. UEA is also expected to undertake observations of HE programmes from 2018-19 as part of its quality assurance process, something which has been welcomed by the Faculty of HE as re-enforcing externality and peer review and support.

The Faculty of HE is working closely with UEA to develop an effective HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy that focuses on continuous improvement of the student academic experience and which suitably prioritises TEF metrics, is data-led and impact-focused.

Rigour and Stretch

The full-time undergraduate programmes have undergone a rigorous programme validation and periodic review process with UoE and an extensive programme validation process with UEA, UAL and The OU, the first two of which hold TEF Gold awards, while UAL holds a TEF Silver award. With a mix of practice learning, work-related learning and fine tuning of programme design through minor modifications, courses remain relevant, current and suitably challenging for students. This is complemented by Programme Leaders and Lecturers, who possess subject expertise, many of whom have worked previously in a related industry or are current practitioners in associated fields and ensure that students gain the knowledge, skills and independence required to make effective progress on their programme and following graduation. Levelness is an active consideration in not only programme design, but also programme delivery. The last three years' external examiner reports have reported positively in this regard when comparing with similar programmes at other institutions in the HE sector.

In relation to independence and 'stretch', the following are notable examples of good practice identified from the 2017-18 external examiner reports: "Within the BA Fashion Course there were many areas of good practice and areas of innovation. The way the programme has been designed, is to give a student a well-rounded knowledge of the industry." (BA (Hons) Fashion Design); "The work of several students was clearly in the upper bracket for the best work being produced nationally… There has been clear, sustained evidence from both testimony of the students, the staff and the quality of the work, that there is an excellent creative culture at play on the course." (BA (Hons) Fine Art); "As observed in previous visits the staff team continue to deliver a well-organised and diverse range of project challenges, students have particularly excelled on the Industry Led Brief module… Students showcased their work at D&AD New Blood Festival 2018… In recognition of their efforts students were awarded a Graphite Pencil for their competition entry at the New Blood Awards Ceremony, as well the three team members were included into the much coveted 2018 New Blood Academy. It can't be overstated enough how impressive this award is, competition for these awards are on an international stage and against very stiff competition. I was impressed by the confidence and very high standard of the work students showcased on their show stand, one student was also selected and awarded a 'One to Watch' sticker, these nominations are decided by a panel of experts who cherry pick individuals whom they feel will become future rising stars." (BA (Hons) Graphic Design).

"The marks for final year work range from a D grade through to an A+. The work at the higher end is exemplary and it is encouraging to see so much work in the 2:1 and 1st bandings." (BA (Hons) Costume Construction); "The enthusiasm and high level of skills that the students have developed and the vocational expertise of the teaching staff was reflected in the variety of work witnessed by the External Examiner (EE) both in the samples and the performance work that the EE was invited to watch." (Pearson BTEC HND in Performing Arts); "Several final year projects were very strong and it would be expected that these students will be getting industry jobs." (BSc (Hons) Computer Games Design); "I find the calibre of Illustration at the top end at Essex Uni is up there with Gnomon and the French Art Schools like Supinfocom and Gobelin." (BA (Hons) Digital Animation); "This remains a comprehensive program which provides a range of interesting elements which allows students to develop innovative approaches to counselling thereby enabling them to develop

specialism for their work as practitioners. The strong emphasis on professional development is in line with BACP emphasis of ongoing professional development and personal growth." (BA (Hons) Counselling).

Feedback
Assessment and feedback protocols (including information about assessment methods used, assessment criteria, types of feedback and feedback turnaround times) are made clear to all students. Student representatives consult their peers in order to evaluate their experiences of assessment and feedback on their programme prior to Programme Boards and then present their findings at Programme Boards. Any issues raised are actioned in an expedient manner and good practice noted and shared by Programme Leaders. This procedure has been in place since 2016-17. A similar approach is adopted by Programme Leaders to feedback from external examiners. These processes have contributed to maintaining student satisfaction across the majority of the split metrics within the associated TEF 4 core metric.

Effective mechanisms are in place for assessment and feedback across programmes, evidenced in part by positive feedback from external examiners, with notable examples from 2017-18 reports including the following: "The teaching team are very proactive in developing the module content and assignment briefs" (BA (Hons) Fashion Design); "As I've noted in my previous external examiner reports the curriculum and its delivery provide ample examples of good practice and innovation." (BA (Hons) Fine Art); Double marking was strictly adhered to and the feedback was both detailed and outlined areas for improvement. The overall grade profile was very pleasing with some excellent work." (BA (Hons) Film & Television Production); "The modules GD204 Mobile Game Development and GD304 Computer Games Management are good examples of team-based project work. It was fantastic to see Self-Evaluation and peer Review incorporated into these assessments." (BSc (Hons) Computer Games Design); "Detailed feedback for students was commendable and this was found to be consistent across the team." (BA (Hons) Special Education Studies); "the variety of written work and presentations enables students to 'play to their strengths' in terms of their own abilities and aptitudes." (BSc (Hons) Psychology and Sociology); "The level of feedback generally on module work throughout on turn it in is excellent and provides the students a clear rationale for their mark and how they are going to improve in future work." (BSc (Hons) Sports Studies).

Learning Environment

Resources
The Marketing Department has undertaken a range of NCOP funded outreach activities during 2017-18, as outlined in Table 6 below.

	Art & Design Industry Week	**Staff and Student Parents Evening**	**CSI Pulse Day**	**Psychology of Magic**
Number of attendees	80	57	89	18
Cost of Event	£4,798.80	£1076.40	£2115.95	£1,284

Table 6: NCOP funded outreach activity to promote progression to HE

Open Days and Taster Days are offered to prospective applicants where they can find out more about higher education programmes at the College, have the opportunity to meet programme tutors, tour the campus with existing HE students and learn about the support available to students. Taster Days enable prospective students to experience a taster lecture and to gain insight from a question and answer session with current students and recent graduates from the College of their in-depth experience of studying at higher education level, including the style of learning and assessment they can expect once their course begins. Open events in 2018/19 have shown a significant rise in student enquiries and attendance from the same time in October 2017.

Programme Leaders attend UCAS events and undertake scheduled visits to schools and colleges in the surrounding areas in order to promote awareness of and subject specific information about the HE programmes on offer at the College. In 2017-18, the College revised Year 1 induction in order to make it more subject focused and less generic, while introducing Year 2 and Year 3 inductions focused on easing the transition from Year 1 to Year 2 and Year 2 to Year 3. The induction for Year 1 in 2018-19 was enhanced to include a social event straight after the subject level induction hosted at a local restaurant/wine bar hired by the College, where new students could talk to a sample of existing students, their Programme Leaders and Lecturers, management, enjoy party games, food, drink and generally socialise. Feedback from student representatives at Programme Boards about the changes to induction since 2017-18 have been positive and welcomed and students have provided valuable suggestions for enhancing the events. More social events are planned for 2018-19 in response to student requests for the same.

Study skills are being embedded into undergraduate programmes, with efforts commencing in 2017-18, delivered on a twice weekly basis and comprising of sessions on 'reading and note-making', 'critical thinking', 'getting started with research', academic writing and proof reading' 'referencing and plagiarism', 'organising yourself', 'presentation and group work' and 'professional identity (in conjunction with careers)'. Take-up in 2018-19 appears to be gathering momentum, with approximately 15 students attending each week. The sessions are delivered to meet individual student needs, with presentation and support materials posted on the VLE. There is active support on a weekly basis on how to search library, online and journal resources and online access to Skills4study campus, a website allowing students access to MOOCS on academic study. In May and June 2018, dissertation masterclasses were run, with over 50 students attending these. Overall, student feedback has been positive. In the instances where students were not entirely satisfied with the dissertation masterclass sessions, this was followed-up with one-to-one appointments with students.

The College has dedicated HE facilities in Purfleet and Southend-on-Sea. As part of the institutional approvals in July 2017, it was agreed that 3% of HE tuition fee income would be spent on library resources (including IT related learning resources.[3] This amounted to approximately £130,000). For 2017-18, the spend has been £36,184, amounting to approximately 0.8% of total net HE tuition fee income (i.e. Gross Tuition fee income *less* partner fees from tuition fee income). At the HE Value for Money Committee on 5th October 2018, for the academic year 2018-19, 3% of net HE tuition fee income *less* ring-fenced tuition fee increases[4] amounted to approximately £113,000 (as at 4th January 2019, £49,292 has been spent). Targeted investment into learning resources at programme level and associated equipment was planned in 2017-18 as part of a series of programme validations and programme level updates. This was on top of the expenditure on library and online resources (including the VLE). In addition, tuition fee increases have been ring-fenced during 2018-19 to contribute to enhancing the student academic experience of Year 1 students (who are subject to the fee increases) and included in the Access Agreement 2018-19 (this is in addition to the standard 25% above £6,165 allocation). This has been extended to the Access and Participation Plan 2019-20 as 'ring-fenced cumulative fee increases', representing the totality of tuition fee increases applied in 2018-19 and 2019-20.

Beyond standard stakeholder involvement in programme validations, employers have been actively engaged in informing and influencing course design since 2017-18 as outlined in Diagram 2 below

[3] This calculation excludes capital expenditure (e.g. via the Formula teaching capital allocation) in order to minimise double counting of expenditure.
[4] "Ring-fenced" amounts, when applied, have been deducted from the calculation in order to reduce the possibility of double counting, since there may be an overlap between learning resources and the student academic experience.

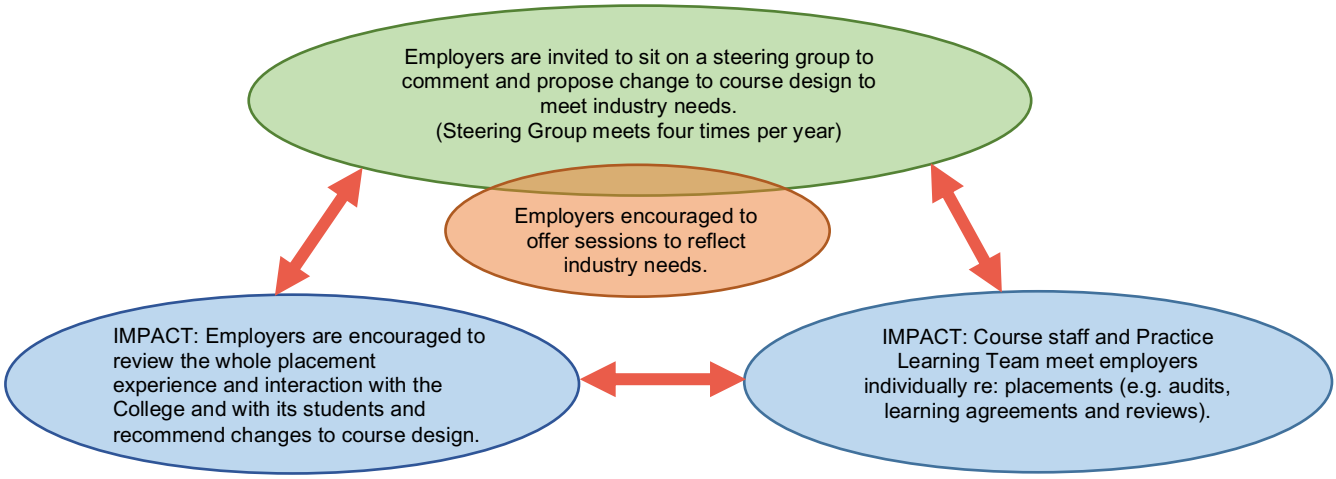


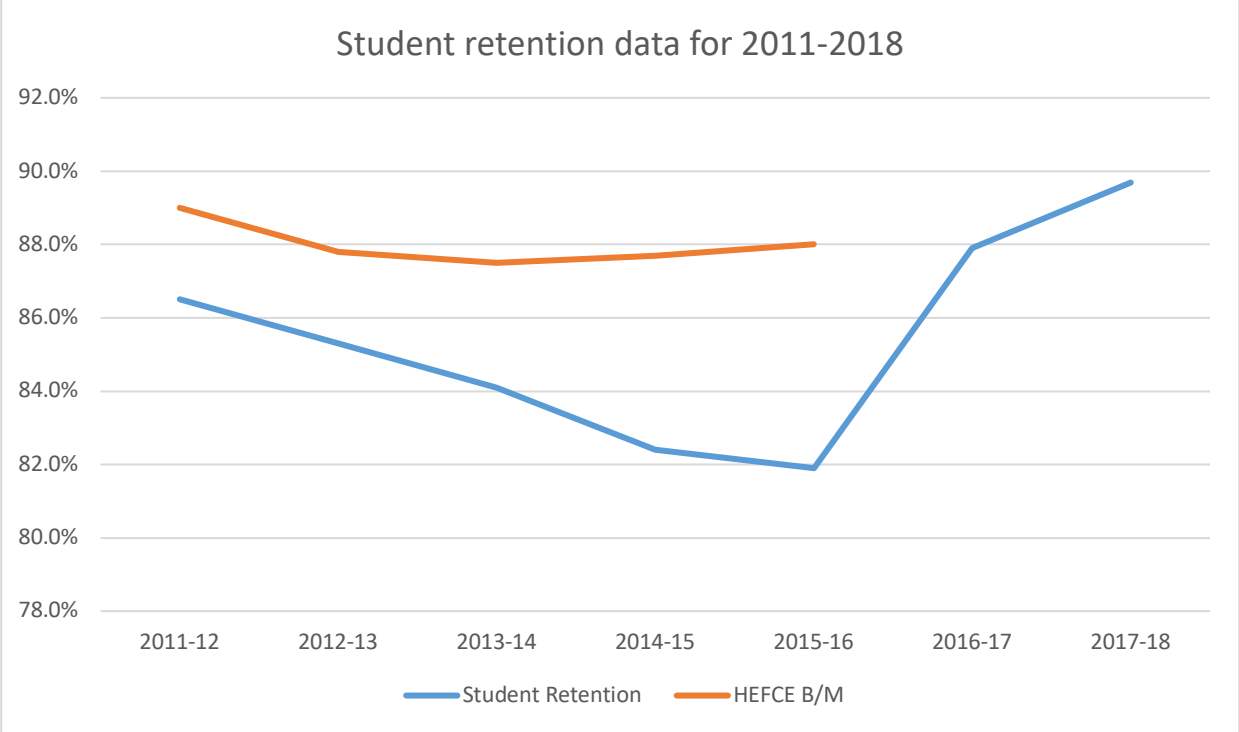
Diagram 2: On-going employer engagement in course design

Scholarship, Research and Professional Practice

Employability and work-related learning are areas that have undergone continued development and enhancement across the full-time HE portfolio (see further "Employability and Transferrable Skills" section below). This has ensured that students remain engaged with relevant and current professional practice in programme related sectors and increased their career focus and engagement with sector related opportunities while on their programme. Some full-time HE programmes are explicitly aligned to professional practice expectations, including but not limited to BA (Hons) Counselling (which emphasises professional development and professional ethics in line with BACP Ethical Framework for The Counselling Professionals), BSc (Hons) Computer Games Design (which undertakes trips to meet industry professionals, maintains links and engages with sector specialists to further develop students' skills) and BA (Hons) Graphic Design (which has had notable success in entering students into sector competitions and undertaking exhibitions at high profile venues). A number of students have reported success in securing work placements, internships or gaining highly skilled employment as a result of the work-related focus of many of the full-time HE programmes.

Personalised Learning

Full-time student retention has been a focus since the QAA HER visit in May 2016, including regular oversight in Programme Boards, the HE Committee and as part of APR, with good progress made on the agreed retention related action plan as part of the 2016-17 HEFCE APR process. In some respects this action plan has been surpassed with changes influenced by the institutional approval requirements and expectations of UEA and The OU (some of which have been noted above). In addition, the HE Strategy 2017-20 includes challenging targets for a range of metrics across the student life-cycle, including student withdrawal rates pre-December 1st in Year 1. The combination of these elements have contributed to the sharp reversal in 2016-17 from the year-on-year decline in the preceding years; and the move to a Faculty of HE, which has been partially phased-in during 2017-18, with some infrastructure being introduced during this period, has contributed to further improvement in student retention rates in absolute terms in 2017-18 (see Table 7 below). The TEF 4 "continuation" metric for Year 3 represents the bottom of student retention in 2015-16 across the period being considered in Table 7 below. Maintenance or further improvement in full-time student retention rates is expected, based on additional initiatives to improve student retention, including but not limited to 'keeping warm' activities for students that have intercalated and a range of new and updated policies and procedures covering student attendance and engagement, fitness to study, student discipline and more expedient interventions.



	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18
Student retention	86.5%	85.3%	84.1%	82.4%	81.9%	87.9%	89.7%
HEFCE B/M	89.0%	87.8%	87.5%	87.7%	88.0%	TBA	TBA

Table 7: Student retention data for SEC, against HEFCE benchmarks for the College for 2011-2018.

The improvement in full-time HE student retention rates is coupled with improvements since 2014-15 in fail withdrawals and intercalations within the student retention period (i.e. 1st December Year 1 to 1st December Year 2) (see Table 8 below).

Year[5]	Retention %	HEFCE B/M %	Difference %	Withdrawn		Fail withdrawn		Transferred		Intercalated	
2017-18	89.7%	TBA	N/A	19	9%	5	2%	1	0.4%	4	2%
2016-17	87.9%	TBA	N/A	24	9%	14	5%	3	1%	1	0.4%
2015-16	81.9%	88.0%	-6.1%	31	11%	36	13%	2	0.7%	0	0%
2014-15	82.4%	87.7%	-5.3%	46	16%	17	6%	1	0.3%	13	5%

Table 8: Student withdrawal, transfer and intercalation rates

Progression from the second year to the final year of a full-time three year undergraduate programme appears to be in a three year decline (see Table 9 below) and is being investigated.

Year	Progression %	Withdrawn		Fail withdrawn		Transferred		Intercalated	
2016-17	86.7%	4	2.4%	18	10.9%	0	0.0%	1	0.6%
2015-16	89.7%	11	6.3%	7	4.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
2014-15	93.7%	7	3.4%	6	2.9%	0	0.0%	2	1.0%

Table 9: Student progression rates from Year 2 to Year 3 of undergraduate programmes

[5] Retention rates for 2014-15 and 2015-16 are based on TEF 3 & 4 figures. Retention rates for 2016-17 and 2017-18 are based on internal data. The calculations for Table 11 do not include a few full-time HE programmes, such as AAT.

Overall, there has been a three year upward trend of First Class degree classifications at the College between 2013-14 to 2016-17, with what appears to be a slight pull-back in 2017-18, while Upper Second Class degree classifications have been on a downward trend during the same period, with a significant increase in 2017-18 (see Table 10 below). Meanwhile, high degree classifications for the College from 2013-14 to 2017-18 appear to be operating in the range 54% to 58% for the period considered. These classifications remain significantly below the national rates published by HESA. This is also the case in relation to high degree classifications at the College when drilling down to student characteristics, including by sex, ethnicity, mature students and those from POLAR Quintiles 1 and 2.

First Class degree				Upper Second Class degree			First & Upper Second Class			Lower Second Class degree			Third Class degree		
Year	SEC	HESA	+/-	SEC	HESA	+/-	SEC	HESA	+/-	SEC	HESA	+/-	SEC	HESA	+/-
17-18	19%	TBA		40%	TBA		58%	TBA		33%	TBA		7%	TBA	
16-17	20%	26%	-6%	34%	50%	-16%	54%	76%	-21%	34%	20%	14%	11%	4%	7%
15-16	14%	24%	-9%	41%	51%	-10%	56%	75%	-19%	38%	21%	17%	7%	4%	3%
14-15	12%	22%	-10%	42%	51%	-9%	54%	73%	-19%	37%	22%	15%	9%	4%	5%
13-14	11%	20%	-9%	46%	51%	-5%	57%	71%	-14%	37%	24%	13%	6%	5%	1%

Table 10: Full-time undergraduate degree classifications against HEFCE national rates

Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

Employment and Further Study

The move to a Faculty of HE has improved the targeted allocation of resources in 2018-19 and provided an opportunity to critically reflect on OfS metrics for the College's HE provision and prioritise application of financial resources where they can have the greatest impact. At present, the TEF 4 metrics and the OfS have identified as high priority Condition B3 in relation to "continuation rates of full-time students" and "progression rates to professional employment or postgraduate study for full-time undergraduate students". To some extent, and factoring in the time lag in TEF 4 metrics, good progress has been made on improving the continuation rates of full-time students in absolute terms. However, maintaining such rates and ensuring continuing improvement will require further initiatives and resources over a period of at least three years. These are currently being planned.

Centrally, one fractional member of staff (0.4 FTE / 15 hours a week) is tasked to "drive forward the College's Careers Education and Guidance provision for Higher Education students by devising, coordinating and delivering high quality, impartial and objective careers information, advice and guidance to current Higher Education students, whilst supporting the further development of embedded (curricular) and discrete careers education …" (Role Specification: Higher Education Careers Coordinator). The calendar of events are focused on information and skills development in relation to employability, progressing into employment and further study. Initial external evaluation of this service has been positive (Matrix report 2018).

The split metric for "first degrees" at the College has been on a downward trend in the last three years relative to the HEFCE benchmark for the same (see TEF 2-4 metrics). This decline deepened in 2017-18 (see TEF 4 metrics). In order to halt the decline and then reverse this trend, urgent remedial action is required, with the deployment of substantial financial resources to fund sustainable activities during the course of the next five years (commencing with a spend of at least circa £208,000 in 2018-19). In the remainder of 2018-19, these activities are expected to include, but are not limited to the following:

- Recruitment of:
  - a HE Work-related Practice Coordinator (1.0) to source further work-related opportunities for UAL validated provision (and HND Performing Arts)

  - an additional HE Practice Learning Coordinator (0.5 FTE) to source further work-related opportunities for UEA validated provision
  - an additional HE Careers Coordinator (1.0)
- Introduction of (more) work-related and business start-up workshops, with sessions delivered by industry professionals
- Increasing guest lectures from industry
- Seeking and funding input from universities with a good track record in student destinations
- Creating and maintaining an alumni database
- Increasing marketing to and recruitment from POLAR and IMD Quintiles 4 & 5 as part of the Faculty of HE growth strategy in order to have a more representative student cohort and because there is likely to be a physical annual limit on local recruitment from POLAR and IMD Quintiles 1 & 2
- Providing programme specific extensive progression guidance workshops, materials and working collaboratively with a range of employers to identify progression opportunities
- The contribution of Programme Leaders in cultivating and relationship managing industry links.

These activities are in addition to the Access Agreement 2018-19 planned spend on employing a HE Widening Participation Officer and a range of projects associated with the Agreement, with a budget of £224,000[6], spread across 'access', 'student success' and 'progression' related projects. 'Access' and 'student success' projects should contribute towards underpinning the improvements in student retention on full-time programmes.

The College is also conscious of the downward trend in split metrics for 'Employment or further study' and 'Highly skilled employment or further study' for part-time provision, the latter of which is approaching a negative flag. The College is mindful of redressing these in current and any future growth in part-time provision. An initial step is to ensure that all new part-time HE programmes regulated by the OfS will reside in the Faculty of HE, thereby benefitting directly from greater specialist oversight and the investment and activities outlined above primarily for the full-time HE programmes. Existing part-time HE programmes that currently reside outside of the Faculty of HE are being reviewed in relation to these two metrics.

Employability and Transferable Skills

The strategic priority given to employability and its embedding within the HE curricula was recognised in the QAA HER report of 2016, which noted that:

> "[f]ollowing curriculum review each programme leading to an award of the University of Essex has an action plan and targets to increase employability. Recent programme developments in the Arts subject area have been developed with employer input, with a strong focus on employability, and combine work-related learning with input from industry professionals and delivery in real life work environments… [the College] has a number of processes in place to ensure that new and existing curricula are informed by contemporary industrial practice… Work-orientated learning is a feature of a substantial number of programmes offered by the College … [ranging] from field trips, live briefs and projects and industry guest speakers to work placements."

The QAA HER partial re-review recognised that Expectation B10 of the QAA UK Quality Code for Higher Education had been strengthened with the appointment of a Practice Learning Coordinator and that further appointments including of a "Work-based Learning Coordinator " had been planned.

[6] This figure includes the on-cost for the HE Widenining Participation Officer.

The Practice Learning Coordinator role, together with input from a part-time consultant in practice learning, has ensured that a number of HE programmes with practice learning elements have benefitted from networks with various professionals / employers, including primary and secondary schools, counselling agencies, business connections, not for profit organisations and voluntary organisations, which has in turn enabled intelligence to be gained about employer needs and emerging trends in this area. This approach is working well and is expected to be rolled out to more HE programmes.

A number of graduating students have (co-)founded organisations following graduation as evidenced in part in Table 11 below.

Graduating Year	HE Programme studied	Organisation name	Organisation sector and activity	Year formed	(Co-)Founder
2017	BA (Hons) Counselling	The Listening Post C.I.C	Community Counselling Service.	2016	Founder
2010	BA (Hons) Early Years Education	The Ark Centre	Therapy Centre for Children with Autism. A regulated setting for delivering effective intervention and support to children with autism, and their families.	2015	Co-founder
2018	BA (Hons) Photography	Melody Fisher Photography	Equine and canine photography.	2018	Founder
2005	BA (Hons) Graphic Design	sixredsquares ltd	Creative design agency.	2005	Co-founder

Table 11: a sample of known organisations (co-)founded by the College's graduates

Time for better metrics

Waiting for impact

The inherent time lag within the provider level TEF metrics means that many of the changes made since November 2015 will not start to appear in the provider level TEF metrics until the next iteration of TEF in 2020. Full-time HE student continuation rates are a case in point. Meanwhile, the interventions for employability since 2016 and the imminent interventions to improve student destinations are expected to take at least five years to feed through into TEF outcomes, taking account of the timeframe for the student journey and the NewDLHE survey, which will take place 15 months after students have graduated.