HE Strategy

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Prelude

This strategy reflects on, refreshes, and supersedes the 2014-19 HE Strategy in response to challenges and opportunities within the HE sector. As will become evident, we are committed to placing the student at the heart of everything we do, including HE[1], with currency of purpose and clarity of direction, engaging fully with the wider HE community.[2] A timeframe of three years provides sufficient opportunity to embed the HE sector norms.[3]

We recognise that HE has undergone a cultural and regulatory shift, with students now at the centre[4] of that shift and expecting a distinctive HE identity that defines their time at the College. We embrace this change, but in order for the College's HE portfolio to be progressive and create the parameters for growth and future partnerships, we need to fully resource, reflect on, and internalise, the HE sector's expectations. This necessitates an acceleration of the College's commitment to elevate the standing and importance of HE within its overall provision.[5]

This strategy, together with the 4 drivers below, is designed to signpost, operationalise and deliver the College's mission and ambition for HE by 2020. This will ensure active engagement of and collaboration with stakeholders in our journey.[6]

4-Drivers

Positively engaging with a changing HE landscape

Resourcing the mission and accelerating growth

Repositioning the HE portfolio

Maximising student opportunities and direction

1-Mission

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[1] This message is echoed in the College's mission statement: "Your life, our college, your future" (and is re-enforced by the College's core values), which should contribute to the College realising its ambitions of being "a first choice provider" and contributing to developing "a workforce that is skilled for success in South Essex" (College Strategic Plan 2017-20).

[2] This aligns to Principle 10 (a) of the HE Enhancement and Continuous Improvement Strategy 2017-20 and re-enforces Principle 4 of that Strategy.

[3] This includes a range of regulatory drivers and other aspects, including, but not limited to, those identified in Principles 5 and 8 of the HE Enhancement and Continuous Improvement Strategy 2017-20.

[4] The student-centred approach can be seen in part in Standards 1.3 and 1.4 ESG (2015).

[5] This is evident in the College's Strategic Plan 2017-20 (section 5.3: "Higher Education").

[6] Collaboration and externality is considered in HEFCE's approach to the processes involving continuous improvement of the student academic experience and outcomes and periodic review, as well as "the Verification Process" that is being developed by QAA (see further the 'definitions' section and Principle 7 of the HE Enhancement and Continuous Improvement Strategy 2017-20).

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.

Driver 1:

Positively engaging with a changing HE landscape

Responding to regulation

The external regulatory environment for publicly funded HE providers has changed since 2016 from a predominantly cyclical model of quality assurance[7], with a focus on a provider's processes, to a more data-driven, risk-based model, with a greater emphasis on continuous improvement, metrics and impact. The funding body for HE, HEFCE, now also regulates and oversees the quality assurance of publicly funded HE providers.[8]

The College's response to the new regulations[9] are covered in Principles 5, 7, 8 and 9 of the HE Enhancement and Continuous Improvement Strategy 2017-20 and associated implementation plan. The new regulations will also be used to inform other existing and new College strategy documents, policies and procedures.

Meeting the metrics

HEFCE has defined a range of metrics and associated benchmarks for publicly funded HE providers, the majority of which are weighted and therefore contextualised to individual HE providers. The metrics can be found embedded in two key processes: the Annual Provider Review and the Teaching Excellence Framework (Year 2).[10] Additional or revised metrics are likely to emerge from the Office for Students (once established). HEFCE and Office for Fair Access (OFFA) are expected to be subsumed within the Office for Students after April 2018, although there is likely to be continuity in the approach already adopted by HEFCE and OFFA, as is implied by sections 2(1)(e) and 2(1)(g) of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017.

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[7] This can be seen in the following review methods: QAA IQER, QAA RCHE, QAA HER.

[8] The majority of this function is subcontracted to QAA as part of the HAR process via the QAA QRV method.

[9] This includes, but is not limited to, HEFCE Assurance Review (HAR), HEFCE Annual Provider Review (APR), HEFCE Teaching Excellence Framework 2 (TEF 2), the Verification Process, the Office for Students (OfS) and any other relevant aspects emerging from or derivative of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017.

[10] See Table 1: Elements of the APR Dashboard in HEFCE's guidance document 2016/29: Annual Provider Review and Annex D: Metrics quick reference table in Teaching Excellence Framework: Year two specification (09/2016).

This Strategy includes some of the metrics that will be actively applied by the College from June 2017 and which are considered to be a strategic priority for the College's HE provision (see Diagram 1 below).[11] The College considers other metrics in the implementation plan associated to Principle 5 of the HE Enhancement and Continuous Improvement Strategy 2017-20, which may be revised from time-to-time in line with HEFCE and OfS requirements.

The College will also seek to align itself to the metrics prescribed by its validating partners for their validated programmes. The embedding of such metrics will be facilitated by the implementation plan associated to Principle 5 of the HE Enhancement and Continuous Improvement Strategy 2017-20.

The metric targets outlined in diagram 1 are designed to swiftly align all our HE provision with that of the lower quartile university sector metrics by 2020 and to promote our longer term ambition to match the metrics of our validating partners in their particular programmes.

The focus here is upon operationalising the metrics outlined across all our HE offer. A set of 'operational flags' or 'triggers' will be established as an essential part of a quality assurance and programme assessment process. An inability to hit the proposed targets will initiate a proportionate intervention response by the department providing the programme to redress any negative deviations from the metrics proposed, including drilling down to underperforming modules and/or their sequencing. The proposed metrics are challenging in nature for a number of programmes and there has been no record of consistent previous attempts at an institutional or programme level to address the metrics directly by the College.

Diagram 1 summarises our embedding of the metrics and intended timeframe for realising them. The withdrawal rate target will be lowered over the three year period for less than or equal to 5%; the retention rate is to rise to 92%+; we have a stable progression target of 95%+; a good degree target of 70%+ by 2020, which represents a marked improvement in student achievement; with employment or further study to be 92%+; and highly skilled employment or further study rising to 63%+.[12]

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[11] A metric table for NSS will be produced alongside the TEF 3 metrics and indicators for the College and embedded in this strategy document, since the NSS questions have been updated for 2017 and the College indicators will need to be realigned to the new TEF 3 metrics and benchmarks. HEFCE will be responsible for roll-out of TEF 3 (see the Higher Education Funding letter for 2017-18).

[12] The metrics percentages apply to programmes with 20 students and above; below this value, absolute numbers will apply.
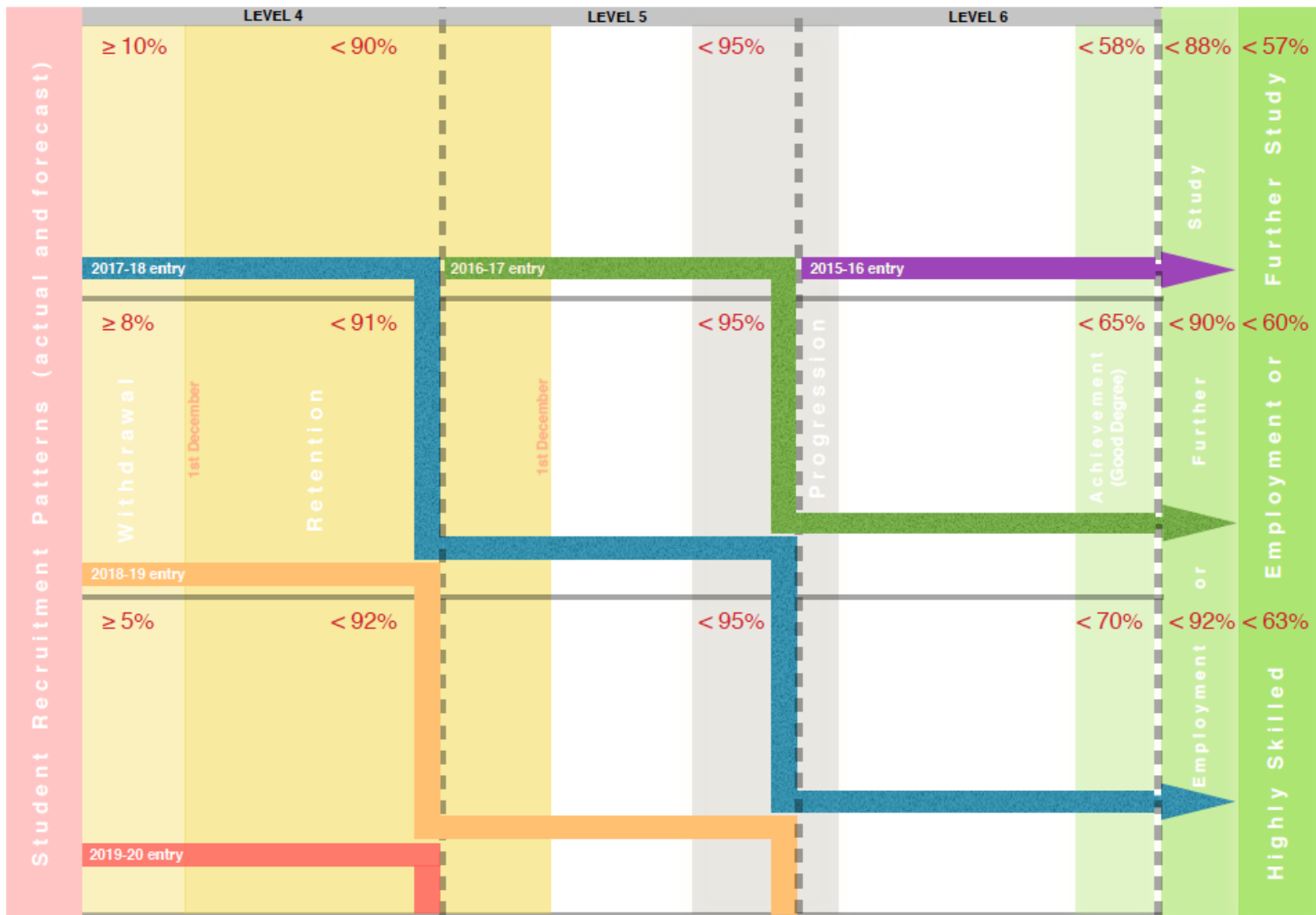
Student Recruitment Patterns (actual and forecast)

	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6		
≥ 10%	< 90%	< 95%	< 58%	< 88%	< 57%

2017-18 entry — 2016-17 entry — 2015-16 entry

≥ 8%	< 91%	< 95%	< 65%	< 90%	< 60%

2018-19 entry

≥ 5%	< 92%	< 95%	< 70%	< 92%	< 63%

2019-20 entry

Withdrawal — 1st December — Retention — 1st December — Progression — Achievement (Good Degree) — Study — Further Study — Further — Employment or — Employment — Highly Skilled — Employment or Further Study

Diagram 1: Meeting the Metrics - the stakeholder journey

*D*river 2:

Resourcing the mission and accelerating growth

Funding follows students

Following our decision to closely align ourselves with the HE sector, and in recognition of its emergent requirement norm for resources to be more directly earmarked for students, a more transparent and accountable system needs to be established. It is necessary to ensure funding follows students throughout their programme, as students are increasingly cognisant of being fee paying clients[13], with responsibility located as close to the student experience as practically possible.

Triggers and transparency in resourcing

Adoption of the metrics and the proposed timeframe of delivery necessitates the College to review and assess its current HE resourcing to ensure realisation of the HE strategy. The triggers or flags are there to provide a guide and indicators to departments and programmes to effectively resource student success and achievement.

The Dean of HE will have an oversight, monitoring and intervention responsibility to ensure that attainment of the metrics and the available resource base are compatible within the department and its programmes.

In order to ensure and assure a consistent high quality student experience, programmes must be financially and academically viable, including sufficient student numbers. This needs to be demonstrated by a robust business case during the proposal, approval and review stages.

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[13] Students " … are increasingly concerned about value for money. In fact, several years of the Student Academic Experience Survey shows that students from all parts of the world, studying in all parts of the UK, are becoming more demanding and putting 'value' under increasing scrutiny." (p2, *The 2016 Student Academic Experience Survey*, Higher Education Academy 2016)

*D*river 3:

Repositioning the HE portfolio

(Re) calibration

The College has been reviewing its HE portfolio and partnership arrangements. This commenced with the move of Art and Design programmes to University of the Arts London in 2014-15. This represented a strategic strengthening of the existing HE offer, with collaborative synergies and long-term benefits for both parties. The College intends to extend this arrangement in 2017-19 for its media and performing arts programmes.

During this period of transition, our first long-standing validating partner, the University of Essex, took this opportunity to review their partnership arrangements as a whole and both parties recognised that they had significantly changed their individual strategic priorities and direction.

Prospective partners are being considered for the remaining HE provision, currently validated by the University of Essex, alongside the potential for innovation in curriculum design and delivery to enhance growth.

Cultural capital

We recognise that the cultural capital for FE is different from HE. Given the College's proposed direction of travel, the need to strengthen our HE knowledge, capability, competency and disposition[14] are important for creating a more distinctive HE identity which will serve to enhance the student journey from enrolment to employment. This should impact positively on a range of metrics, including, but not limited to, retention, progression, achievement and beyond.

In addressing the drivers highlighted in our HE Strategy, we are directly investing in, and increasing, our HE cultural capital by 2020 to the benefit of all existing and prospective stakeholders.

Staff are an important component in facilitating the cultivation and development of cultural capital within the College. At present, staff development is largely directed at improving their professional practice through structured professional development or activity.[15] To underpin and drive future growth of the HE provision, there is a need to direct additional staff development activity towards the expansion of the HE cultural capital base.

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[14] These four elements define our interpretation and use of cultural capital.
[15] This is in line with strategic objective 3.3 of the College Strategic Plan 2017-20 and evidenced by numerous external examiner reports that consider as good practice the link between professional activity and programme design and/or delivery (see appendix 29 of College's Institutional Annual Review of Courses for 2015-16).

*D*river 4:

Maximising student opportunities and direction

From access to achievement

As an actively engaged widening participation institution, the College continues to apply and enhance strategies and processes that underpin this[16] in order to maximise our students' opportunities and their life chances.[17] We have an established record of taking both non-traditional and traditional entrants internal to the College and from the local region and preparing them for the world of work or further study.

We have a commitment to develop the skill and knowledge set of our students for their own and future employers benefit. We recognise that over half the employees with vacancies in the South East demand graduates, and there is a shortfall of such qualified candidates in the area. With this in mind, both our current and future HE provision will be more firmly based upon identifying and anticipating employer demand and emerging skills shortages, directly involving employers in programme development initiatives to ensure both the currency and appropriateness of that provision.

The College recognises that it cannot compete directly with Universities in the region with respect to research but will do so with regard to its teaching and vocational orientation, so playing to its recognised strengths. For example, two cross-cutting themes have emerged in the College's Institutional Annual Review of Courses for 2015-16 covering the University of Essex validated provision: teaching, learning and assessment and work-related learning/employability.[18]

From partnership to progress

The College recognises its stakeholders as active partners in the design and delivery of its HE provision. The key stakeholders include validating partners, students, staff and employers.

Validating partners are selected on the basis of mutual benefit and a shared approach to valuing and advancing the student academic experience. This is demonstrated in the way the College is committed to using validating partner strategies to inform some of its own strategies and initiatives, especially where they

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[16] Examples include the HE Student Support Forum and HE Student Support Strategy, and the Access Agreement 2018-19, which re-enforces investment in the student journey (i.e. a fee increase of £500 per full-time programme has been ring-fenced to further innovate and improve the student academic experience. Work is carried out to actively support and develop all students, including those with declared disabilities, and by the embedding of study skills.

[17] This is in line with the College's mission, stated in its Strategic Plan 2017-20, of "Your life, our college, your future".

[18] Cross-cutting themes are considered further in Principle 2 of the HE Enhancement and Continuous Improvement Strategy 2017-20.

are likely to add value to the student experience.[19] Validating partners gain an increased footprint in the South East Region, potentially improve widening participation and an established pathway from FE to HE.

Student engagement and voice are paramount in the monitoring and review of HE programmes.[20] This assists in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience,[21] encouraging them to take an active role in creating the learning process,[22] cultivating ownership and independent learning.

Staff play a pivotal role in engaging and motivating students, but in order for this to be sustained, their knowledge, experience and expertise continue to be recognised and utilised to the benefit of the College and its HE provision. This is complemented by validating partners providing opportunities for staff to engage in innovative practice, currency of scholarship and interact with the wider HE community.[23] The profile of the staff reflects the vocational tradition of the College, with many having a substantial background in industry and professional practice. These attributes serve to maintain a distinctive HE offer.

The vocational orientation of the College and its HE provision necessitates the sustained direct involvement of employers from programme initiation through to the graduate labour market. This is underpinned by work-related learning and the increasing employer links established by our staff and students.

*P*ostlude

The HE Strategy 2017-20 directly addresses each of the four drivers and our engagement with the HE sector, its demands, expectations, opportunities and trajectory through an associated implementation plan and related strategies. This is the first stage of formally aligning it with mainstream HE.

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[19] This is largely captured by Principles 1 and 2 of the HE Enhancement and Continuous Improvement Strategy 2017-20.

[20] The College is committed to expanding the range of student engagement initiatives in order to capture the student voice as widely as possible. For example, a current initiative is to employ a Student Union Associate, currently a Level 5 student on sabbatical, to assist in facilitating further student engagement as part of QAA HER preparation, and beyond. See further, the implementation plan for the HE Enhancement and Continuous Improvement Strategy 2017-20.

[21] Expectation B5.

[22] Standard 1.3, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015).

[23] See Principle 10(a) of the HE Enhancement and Continuous Improvement Strategy 2017-20.

HE Strategy Full Implementation Plan 2017-20

Driver	Action	Success indicators	Start time	Finish time	Responsibility	Milestones	Progress check	impact
Driver 1: Positively engaging with a changing HE landscape								
Responding to regulation	Align systems and processes to HEFCE APR requirements	Completed annual returns Positive engagement with HEFCE	05/2017	04/2018	Principal Dean of HE Heads of HE	11/2017		
	Apply for TEF 3	TEF 3 awarded	2017/18	2018		2018		
	Update / migrate systems to OfS	Full and timely compliance with OfS	03/2018	07/2020		04/2020		
	Prepare for HEFCE Desk-top review (Verification Process)	Positive outcome / grade	09/2017	2018		01/2018		
	Prepare for HEFCE Assurance Review Visit (HAR)	Positive outcome / grade	2018	2019		05/2018 07/2018 09/2018 11/2018 01/2019 03/2019		
	Align to Higher Education and Research Act 2017 and associated delegated legislation	No adverse notices or loss of standing.	05/2017	07/2020		11/2017 05/2018 11/2018 05/2019 11/2019 05/2020		
Meeting the metrics	Embed and operationalise the metrics and triggers	Full engagement by all staff	07/2017	07/2018	Dean of HE (oversight) Heads of Department (oversight) Programme Leaders Programme Teams	07/2018		
	Monitor the metrics and triggers	Meeting targets Non-intervention	07/2017	07/2020		07/2018 07/2019 07/2020		
	Maintain the currency of the metrics and indicators, based on APR, TEF 3 and OfS	Full compliance Positive outcome	2018	2020	Dean of HE Heads of HE	02/2018 02/2019 02/2020		

Driver	Action	Success indicators	Start time	Finish time	Responsibility	Milestones	Progress check	impact
Driver 2: Resourcing the mission and accelerating growth								
Funding follows students	Transparent and earmarked HE budget	A fully accountable resource model Effective tracking of funding allocation and spend	09/2017	2020	Principal Deputy Principal Dean of HE Heads of Department	07/2018 07/2019 07/2020		
Triggers and transparency in resourcing	Matching resourcing to risk, student numbers and a robust business case	Effectively resource student success and achievement, with strong stakeholder feedback (i.e. SSS, NSS, programme boards, external examiners and employers)	09/2017	2020	Dean of HE (oversight) Heads of Department	09/2017 09/2018 09/2019 09/2020		
Driver 3: Repositioning the HE portfolio								
(Re) calibration	Prune and grow the HE offer	New validating partners New or revised degree programmes Close unviable programmes	09/2017	2020	Principal Dean of HE Heads of Department	09/2018 09/2019 09/2020		
Cultural capital	Create distinctive and attractive HE identity	Staff fully engaged with the HE sector Improved student success and achievement, matching sector norms	09/2017	2020	Deputy Principal Dean of HE Heads of Department HE Staff	09/2018 09/2019 09/2020		
	Dedicated HE training programme linked to HEA fellowship	Establish and deliver innovative internal HE staff development training programme	12/2017	2020	Dean of HE Director of T & L Heads of Department			
		HE staff enrolling on the HEA fellowship	09/2018	2020	Heads of Department HE Staff	09/2019 09/2020		

Driver	Action	Success indicators	Start time	Finish time	Responsibility	Milestones	Progress check	impact
Driver 4: Maximising student opportunities and direction								
From access to achievement	Ring-fence fee increase in the Access Agreement 2018-19 for targeted investment in the student academic experience	Access Agreement 2018-19 agreed by OFFA	05/2017	07/2019	Dean of HE	07/2018		
		Increase widening participation	09/2018	07/2019	Dean of HE Head of Marketing Head of Student Services	N/A		
	Identify and anticipate employer demand and future skills gaps	Increased levels of employment, especially in the highly skilled areas	09/2017	2020	Dean of HE (oversight) Head of Marketing Heads of Department Programme Leaders	09/2018 09/2019 09/2020		
	Increase direct employer engagement with our programmes	Maintaining the currency and relevance of our HE portfolio			Heads of Department (oversight) Programme Leaders HE Staff			
From partnership to progress	Institutional & programme validation: OU	Institutional & programme validation achieved	05/2017	07/2017	Dean of HE (oversight) Heads of HE (oversight) Heads of Department Programme Leaders HE Staff	TBC		
	Institutional validation: UEA	Institutional validation achieved	05/2017	07/2017				
	Programme validation: UEA	Programme validation achieved	09/2017	05/2018				
	Programme validation: UAL	All programme validations achieved in scheduled timeframe	11/2017	07/2018				