

Access Agreement for Higher Education at South Thames College Group 2018-19 (comprising Carshalton, Kingston, Merton and South Thames Colleges)

A New College Group for South West London

Introduction to the College

From 1 August 2017 Carshalton College, Kingston College and South Thames College (which also included the Merton College campus) merged under type B merger arrangements (governed by the Further Education Corporations (Publication of Proposals) (England) Regulations 2012, SI 2012 No. 1157) to create a new college group for South West London. Under these arrangements Carshalton and South Thames College were dissolved and their property, rights and liabilities transferred to the remaining college, Kingston College.

Kingston College, the successor body, subsequently proposed to the Secretary of State a name change to “South Thames College Group” and this was approved and adopted from 1 August 2017.

The component parts of the College

The three colleges that merged were general further education colleges that delivered vocational education and skills training. Carshalton College was based in Sutton and in 2016/17 had a total of 2,700 students (1,300 full-time and 1,400 part-time), Kingston College was based at two sites in Kingston and in 2016/17 had a total of 6,000 students (3,300 full-time and 2,700 part-time). South Thames College had three sites in Merton, Wandsworth and Tooting, and in 2016/17, had a total of 13,800 students (3,300 full-time and 10,500 part-time).

From 1 August 2017 the new South Thames College Group operates from 4 college centres;

- Carshalton College located in the London Borough of Sutton;
- Kingston College, its two campuses located in Kingston town centre, in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames;
- Merton College located in the London Borough of Merton;
- South Thames College from two campuses, the main campus in Wandsworth High Street and the Tooting Centre both of which are located in the London Borough of Wandsworth.

Kingston College centre is situated in Kingston town centre, in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames.

According to the Children and Young People’s Plan for 2013-17 the Royal Borough describes itself as:

”According to the 2011 Census, Kingston has a population of 160,100 – the third smallest of any London borough (after the City of London and Kensington and Chelsea). Nearly a quarter of residents are aged between 0 and 19.

The 2011 Census estimated that 25.5% of the population came from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups, compared to 15.5% in 2001, and the borough is predicted to become more ethnically diverse over the next decade. However, Kingston remains less ethnically diverse than London as a whole, where over 40% of the population are from BAME groups. Kingston has

significant numbers of Koreans, Tamils and Arabs relative to the size of its population. The borough also has the tenth highest percentage in England and Wales (10.7%) of households with multi-ethnicity partnerships. The school age population is estimated to be even more ethnically diverse: according to the 2012 Spring School Census, 35.7% of children living and attending a state school in Kingston came from BAME groups and 32% spoke English as an additional language. The same Census recorded at least 143 first languages other than English within Kingston's school population.

Kingston ranks as the third least deprived of all 33 London boroughs according to the 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation. However, there are extremes of advantage and disadvantage across the borough: for example, Kingston contains super output areas ranked within both the 2% most deprived and 2% least deprived in England for income deprivation affecting children. The people of Kingston are relatively healthy, affluent and well educated. In 2007, Kingston was ranked as the 3rd least deprived London Borough and 245th out of 354 in England. The population of Kingston is multi-ethnic with an estimated 20 per cent from minority ethnic groups (2006 data). The number of school leavers attaining 5 GCSEs at A*-C, including English and Mathematics, is well above both the London and National average at 70.1 per cent (National average of 59.3% and London 62.3%)".The local educational environment is competitive with 6th forms in all local secondary schools, Grammar Schools and independent provision.

The College student population is significantly different to that of Kingston, with 50 per cent of learners from minority ethnic groups. Learners are recruited from a wide area of South West London and the average travel to learn is in excess of 5 miles.

There is an improving trend of progression to further and higher education and positive destination outcomes for students leaving the College in 2015 rose to 91.5%, with some 1,100 students progressing into Higher Education.

Carshalton College centre is located in Nightingale Road and is situated in the London Borough of Sutton. The College attracts learners primarily from the boroughs of Sutton, Merton and Croydon. Approximately 30% of the student cohort is from minority ethnic heritage backgrounds. Learners enrol at the College from over 90 educational establishments each year. According to the London Borough of Sutton's 2016/17 Economy Watch the Borough can be described in the following ways;

- *"The economy is in a good position, being one of only a few boroughs to experience population growth, with a professional workforce lending itself to a higher proportion of disposal income. This provides a good platform for future investment and developments where families have schools that are performing well and achieving excellent educational standards for children, performing above London and national averages. The economy attracts micro enterprises which are able to sustain and develop over the longer term being driven by a resourceful population driving the commercial and retail sectors forward.*
- *The overall health of Sutton's economy is in a resilient position to face new challenges and build."*

Merton College centre is located on London Road, Morden and is situated in the London Borough of Merton. According to the London Borough of Merton's Economic Narrative Report of 2012 the Borough is described;

“As with other parts of the country, Merton faces challenges arising from continuing economic weakness. Continued uncertainty regarding national and international economic prospects means that, more than ever, local places need to create their own economic destiny. Some sectors, such as business and professional services, are likely to continue to grow. Others, including the public sector and manufacturing will see a decline in employment. Retail employment will grow slower than the pre-recession rate due to changing retail trends and the rise of online shopping.

“Other strengths of the borough are that it is generally a very safe place, with good transport connections and relatively low levels of deprivation and crime. This has been reflected in relatively high average house prices compared to London as a whole. However, the aggregate picture masks a significant divide between the west and the east of the borough {in which Merton College is located}.. The west is a prominent employment location, with better transport connections, a more highly skilled population, and consequent levels of crime and deprivation.

In contrast the east of the borough has poorer transport links, fewer numbers of jobs, a less highly skilled resident population and higher – though not high – levels of crime and deprivation. Whilst the east of the borough is not struggling in the same way that more seriously deprived parts of London are, the differences between the two halves of the borough are still jarring and suggest a need for economic strategy to focus on supporting opportunities for residents across the borough. In doing so, there is a need to recognise the role which differential quality of transport connections play in determining areas of economic strength in the borough.

“Merton has many economic strengths, including a well-educated resident population, high average wage levels which can support local retail and leisure, an internationally recognised sporting venue and competition, and excellent transport links. Nonetheless, the poor employment growth record of the past decade shows that these strengths on their own will not bring additional employment to Merton.”

South Thames College centre operates from two campuses – the main one on Wandsworth High Street and the other in Tooting High Street – both are in the London Borough of Wandsworth.

Ofsted described the College in its May 2016 report as *“one of the largest colleges in London. Most learners live locally to the college, three quarters of whom are from socially disadvantaged areas. The majority of learners are of minority ethnic heritage backgrounds.*

The proportion of school leavers locally who achieve five GCSEs at grades A to C is higher than the national rate. The majority of the local population are qualified to level 2”.*

The London Borough of Wandsworth described itself in May 2017 on its Economic Profile as;

- *“Wandsworth has a very well qualified workforce, receiving above average earnings compared to other London residents.*

- According to the 2011 UK Census, 53.6% of usual residents aged 16 and over had Level 4 qualifications and above (degree level or higher), the second highest proportion nationally outside the City of London.
- Correspondingly, the proportion of residents with no qualifications, Level 1 (1+ GCSE or equivalent) qualifications and Level 2 (5+ GCSEs Grade A to C or equivalent) were amongst the lowest in the country.
- 33.1% of Wandsworth's full-time students aged 18 to 74 were also in employment, higher than the Inner London (28.7%) and London (31.4%) averages.
- Between 2001 and 2011, the number of usual residents with Level 4 qualifications and above increased by 42%, leading to a 6.3 percentage point increase in the proportion of the population. This was offset by a reduction in the number of people with lower level qualifications. The number of full-time students aged 18 to 74 living in the borough increased by 32% over the decade.
- Hours and Earnings - The Office of National Statistics' annual survey of hours and earnings (as shown on www.nomisweb.co.uk Labour Market Report) found that the gross weekly pay of full time workers living in Wandsworth to be £689.70 compared to the London average of £613.30 and GB average of £508.
- Prosperity Profile - According to a Local Futures Place Profile (© 2012) prosperity scoring, Wandsworth is ranked 7 out of 408 districts on a prosperity score, indicating incomes amongst the resident population in the top 20% of districts nationally. The report found that:
 - "At £49,500, the average total income in Wandsworth is well above the national median, with the area ranking in the top 20% of districts nationally. By comparison, the London Central figure is £63,170 and the national figure is £26,845.
 - At £535,290, the average house price in Wandsworth is very high, with the area ranking in the top 20% of districts nationally. By comparison the London Central figure is £718,039 and the national figure is £238,638."
- Safety - Wandsworth had the lowest crime rate in inner London with the number of offences continuing to fall, according to Local Futures, reiterating the borough's reputation as a safe area and attractive to incoming investors as well as residents."

The South Thames College Group – a new college for south west London – rationale for change (source of quotes; "A consultation on a proposal for merger – Carshalton College, Kingston College and South Thames College March – April 2017")

At the time of the merger the following were identified as they key rationale for change in the provision of further education in south west London;

- "Local delivery in a regional context
- Realising growth
- Promoting excellence and innovation
- Delivering efficiency and the means to invest
- Increasing relevance
- Building resilience and sustainability
- Leading social justice
- Valuing partnership"

A new vision for further education in south west London

The following were the key parts of the new College's vision as outlined at the time of merger;

- *“Strong identity and values*
- *Growth based on quality and relevance*
- *Options to specialise*
- *A robust improvement culture*
- *Broad progression pathways*
- *Curriculum innovation”*

Benefits and opportunities of the new merged college

Amongst many benefits and opportunities identified as a consequence of the merger the following were relevant for learners and the community;

- *“For **learners***
- *An enhanced curriculum which meets learners' needs, helping them to progress on to employment or further study*
- *A wider range of expert teaching staff, many of them industry experts too*
- *Improved resources and facilities to support learning and progression*
- *More opportunities to develop the essential enterprise and employability skills required by local employers*
- *Increased opportunities for enrichment and a diverse student population*

- *For **communities***
- *Enhanced career or specialism opportunities*
- *Further opportunities for professional development and peer support*
- *A more financially stable college ensures longer-term job stability*
- *Greater opportunities for sharing best practice and professional expertise*

*These will be achieved as a result of the core goal of the organisation which will be **to achieve outstanding results**. Success will be judged by students' achievements and their progression into higher study or sustainable careers, with a focus on the following;*

- *Specialisation*
- *Diversification*
- *Responsiveness*
- *Improvement”*

This is the fourth annual Access Agreement published by the successor College (Kingston) and the first written to recognise the new merged College identity (the first having been agreed by HeFCE during the Summer of 2014). The first and subsequent Access Agreements outlined the plan to increase the tuition fees for Honours Degree above the basic tuition fee to initially £6,850 per year and in 2017/18 to £7,500 and also outlined the College's plans to further develop its work to promote widened participation in Higher Education study. Alongside this the College made ongoing commitments that the majority of HE learners would be charged at or below the basic tuition fee level and indeed the part time tuition fees remain at a very modest level compared to many other HE providers.

South Thames College had published an Access Agreement in 2016/17 when planning to recruit students to a new BSc (Hons) Live Sound and Studio Engineering bearing a tuition fee of £9,000 but recruitment to that did not take place until 2017/18 and no other courses incurred a fee in excess of the basic tuition fee.

Carshalton College have never published an Access Agreement as no courses offered incurred a tuition fee above the basic level.

This fourth Access Agreement which represents the first of the merged College looks to confirm the fee arrangements for the new merged entity by making few changes to the tuition fees offered by the previously separate colleges apart from some rationalisation and simplification and the application in index linked rises available as a result of the Colleges' application in January 2017 for recognition under the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

At this stage it is difficult to draw strong conclusions about the impact of the College's commitment to widening participation resulting from its first Access Agreement which operated for the first time in 2015-16 although the following evaluative comments were made in the Monitoring Report submitted to OFFA in January 2017;

- *“This is the first year of the operation of the College's Access Agreement and thus progress has been modest in some areas but good in others (although whether this is sustainable will be seen). The decision to agree and publish the Access Agreement was made quite late in the year of application. The submission was therefore made very near the deadline date and the lead in time to implement and externally promote the plans was further limited. The level of competition from universities who have been willing to drop their UCAS entry points and from new private providers has had an impact upon student recruitment particularly from the courses and groups to which the Access Agreement has particular relevance.”*
- *“Whilst this is very early to be sure of longer term and sustainable success the progress that was made to date in this first year of the Access Agreement demonstrates on target progress in respect of ethnic diversity of HE population and an increase in the percentage of HE student population drawn from ethnic minority backgrounds, an increase in the number of HE students declaring disabilities and the number of [FE] students progressing to university. This can partly be attributed to a general uplift in College achievement results at L3, an increase in College reputation and OFSTED recognition and success in helping and supporting HE students to identify and request support for previously undiagnosed difficulties.”*
- *“Little progress was made on increasing access for mature learners - insufficient promotion of support packages available and development of additional curriculum relevant to this type of learner being developed more slowly than anticipated. The very presence of substantial tuition fees (in spite of financial support packages being available) seems a real barrier to groups who are often concentrating upon providing opportunity for their children at the expense of themselves. Less progress was also made on student appreciation of pre-course information / advice than hoped for - significant numbers of applicants still are made via UCAS Clearing and not benefitting from the full application/admissions/enrolment cycle. Also a change of wording of student feedback questionnaire has meant a slight inconsistency in data to milestone.”*

The above commentary arose from the review of the working of the OFFA Access Agreement at two of the College's Higher Education cross college meetings. The Higher Education Operations Group (HEOG) meets six times per year and has a membership of staff from a range of Academic, and functional areas, and includes, for example, staff from HE Admissions, Student Support and the Learning Resources Centre. These staff have fed back evidence from day to day interaction with students and from review of data the impact of our activities and have, for example, influenced some changes to the eligibility for bursaries including changes to minimum ages for those living independently, additional support for care leavers, and increased focus on supporting those with mental health conditions.

The Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB), which also meets six times a year and provides a more strategic view of the College has as part of its terms of reference the planning for, and input to the writing and review of the College's Access Agreement and the annual monitoring exercise quoted from above.

Student representation at the Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB) and the termly cross college Higher Education Student Forum provide a student perspective.

The milestones that the College has set itself for 2018-19, which are outlined on pages 19/20, demonstrate a changed focus in a number of ways and some additional commitments. These include;

- A lower level of emphasis upon financial support and bursaries in our attempts to attract full time learners (a reduction in OFFA countable expenditure from 17.6% to 16.9% - in real value terms this is more significant as the overall spend will increase but this commitment will remain fairly static in future years).
- An increased focus on partnership working with AimHigher S London and HE in London to attract particularly full time learners from the BME group and white working class males from the lower participating POLAR groups (this will include an additional targeted focus upon boys schools not only in the Royal Borough of Kingston but also the four adjoining boroughs).
- An increased commitment of finance and staff to provide support to learners whilst on their course and during their period of study to help them succeed and then progress to successful employment/further education opportunities (an increase in OFFA countable expenditure from 2.3%% to 3.1% on student success and from 1.8% to 2.0% on progression activities). Because of the planned increase in Honours Degree fees and the resultant increase in real terms of the amount being spent on widening participation activities the value of these planned commitments will actually rise from 2016-17 by 50% in relation to success activities and by 100% in terms of progression.

Profile of HE provision at South Thames College Group

The College is unusual due to the high number of its HE provider partners and indeed this has increased following the merger and the formation of the South Thames College Group: Kingston University; University of West London; University of Greenwich; Middlesex University; University of Roehampton; Canterbury Christchurch University; University of Northampton plus Pearson's courses. These arrangements encompass more than fifty individual degree and sub-degree

programmes ranging from Foundation Year Zero programmes to a post-graduate certificate. Partners have been specifically chosen to complement the expertise of the College's Schools, as well as to widen the range of progression opportunities available to students. The College does not separate Further Education (FE) and HE students by any physical barriers on its campuses. HE students in College are able to progress from FE courses; this in turn provides inspiration to new FE learners and helps to raise awareness of progression opportunities to HE.

At the time of writing there are around 1,730 students enrolled on HE courses, of which approximately half are on directly funded courses and the other half are on franchised programmes. Kingston College centre has the largest number of HE students with approx. 1,140 currently enrolled, along with 350 approximately at the Wandsworth College centre, 250 approximately at Carshalton College centre and there is no HE provision at Merton College.

The College's expansion of its directly funded provision over recent years has, amongst a range of opportunities, provided greater flexibility in being able to construct programmes of learning that better fit its profile of non- traditional HE students.

In a changing economic environment, students are looking for more viable routes into HE that are both affordable, offer vocational avenues into employment, and are supportive of non-traditional learners. With this in mind the HNC/HND portfolio has been substantially expanded in the areas of the Creative Industries. The College's part time offering is developing with the opportunity offered for the first time in 2015-16 to "Top Up" from HNC to HND in Travel and Tourism Management and that same opportunity offered for the first time in 2016-17 on the HNC/D in Sports and Exercise Science course. In the College's previous Access Agreements detailed analysis has been included of the profile of HE students at the College. However, at the time of writing this agreement that data is not available for all parts of the newly merged College. However, the profile of the HE student population at the largest of the College sites (Kingston College) is available and below is data drawn from the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) metrics which provide an average profile of the College's HE population over a five year period.

| | | Full-time | | Part-time | | Total | |
|----------------------|---------------|-----------|-----|-----------|-----|-----------|-----|
| | | Headcount | % | Headcount | % | Headcount | % |
| Level of study | First degree | 1,191 | 75% | 105 | 37% | 1,296 | 69% |
| | Other UG | 392 | 25% | 180 | 63% | 572 | 31% |
| Age | Under 21 | 1,032 | 65% | 143 | 50% | 1,175 | 63% |
| | 21 to 30 | 386 | 24% | 81 | 28% | 467 | 25% |
| | Over 30 | 165 | 10% | 61 | 21% | 226 | 12% |
| Ethnicity | White | 665 | 42% | 148 | 52% | 813 | 44% |
| | Black | 289 | 18% | 50 | 18% | 339 | 18% |
| | Asian | 432 | 27% | 60 | 21% | 492 | 26% |
| | Other | 183 | 12% | 26 | 9% | 209 | 11% |
| | Unknown | 14 | 1% | 0 | 0% | 14 | 1% |
| Sex | Male | 851 | 54% | 157 | 55% | 1,008 | 54% |
| | Female | 730 | 46% | 128 | 45% | 858 | 46% |
| | Other | 5 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 5 | 0% |
| Disability | Yes | 133 | 8% | 28 | 10% | 161 | 9% |
| | No | 1,451 | 92% | 258 | 90% | 1,709 | 91% |
| Entry qualifications | High tariff | 17 | 1% | 5 | 2% | 22 | 1% |
| | Medium tariff | 80 | 5% | 10 | 3% | 90 | 5% |
| | Low tariff | 803 | 51% | 90 | 31% | 893 | 48% |
| | Non tariff | 683 | 43% | 181 | 63% | 864 | 46% |
| Domicile | UK | 1,462 | 92% | 266 | 94% | 1,728 | 93% |
| | Other EU | 51 | 3% | 5 | 2% | 56 | 3% |
| | Non-EU | 71 | 4% | 13 | 5% | 84 | 4% |
| Local students | Yes | 366 | 25% | 92 | 35% | 458 | 27% |
| | No | 1,092 | 75% | 173 | 65% | 1,265 | 73% |
| POLAR | 1 | 80 | 8% | 11 | 8% | 91 | 8% |
| | 2 | 93 | 10% | 12 | 9% | 105 | 10% |
| | 3 | 218 | 23% | 39 | 29% | 257 | 24% |
| | 4 | 226 | 24% | 27 | 20% | 253 | 24% |
| | 5 | 325 | 35% | 44 | 33% | 369 | 34% |

The Carshalton College centre's HE student profile is almost exclusively adult/mature learners studying for Foundation Degrees/ Top Up degrees alongside work. A substantial proportion of those are first generation undergraduates from a very diverse background and the majority are female. With the majority of learners returning to study after a substantial period of time and with limited prior experience of study the levels of academic support required are high.

The Wandsworth College centre's HE population is more varied with a mixture of traditional undergraduate aged younger learners and more mature learners studying alongside work. They study a range of HNC/D, Teacher Education courses and the new BSc (Hons) Live Sound and Studio Engineering. Some students study part of their Foundation Degree in Pharmacy at the College (the remaining part at the partner university) and others all of their Foundation Degree in Early Years Education. In the borough of Wandsworth the BAME percentage of the population is 25% (London Ave 40%, 2011 census). The College's HE provision is by comparison 75% BAME.

UCAS and HESA data clearly shows that women are more likely to enter HE than men. At South Thames College the HE student cohort is 55% male, compared to circa 44% reported in 2012-13 HESA data. Approximately 43% of HE students live in areas classified as being socially disadvantaged (Ward uplift field in ILR).

Higher Education Strategy

At the time of writing this Access Agreement for 2018/19 the new merged College does not have a specific strategy for its HE provision, and that previously published has now expired and related to the pre-merger situation. Reference should be made to the College's website for the new merged College's Higher Education Strategic Objectives that underpin and expand on the College's values described earlier.

Supporting and understanding widening participation

As a method of implementing the HE Strategy the College developed, in 2014, a HE management committee structure incorporating a HE Academic Board, and an HE Operations Forum, which report into the College's overall Committee structure. Agenda points relating to widening participation activities provide the basis for the oversight and enhancement of the College's strategic approach to both academic activities and support activities throughout the students' life cycle. It is via this Committee structure that the impact of the College's Access Agreement and widening participation activities are monitored. This demonstrates the real importance that the College accords to the widening of participation in HE.

Significant HE documents have been mapped to the Quality Code, and mapping to the Quality Code has also taken place in Admissions, Marketing and Student Support to help towards a better understanding of HE requirements inclusive of access and widening participation activities.

The College continues to actively strengthen, seek and promote widening participation opportunities to prepare students for progression to further academic studies through internal and external progression routes and for employment.

The College's commitment to Equality and Diversity

Equality and Diversity are central to the work of the College. At South Thames College Group and at all our centres we will treat all people with dignity and respect and we will promote equality of opportunity and diversity.

At South Thames Colleges Group we treat each other fairly, with respect and dignity regardless of:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender
- Gender Reassignment
- Race
- Religion/Belief
- Pregnancy/ Maternity
- Marriage /Civil partnership
- Sexual Orientation

We strive to create an environment where everyone is supported in realising their goals and aspirations. Therefore, we promote equality and celebrate diversity and will not tolerate discrimination, which is not only wrong but also hurtful and can be illegal.

This achieved by;

- Our underlying commitment is to eliminate discrimination and promote equality across all protected characteristics which translates to Equality and Diversity being embedded in all policies, practices, decision making and evaluative processes.
- We actively promote access to learning programmes and services for all our learners and potential clients to enable them to improve their skills, to make progress and be successful in realising their ambitions.
- We create a visibly diverse environment, which values and celebrates difference and raises the aspiration of existing and potential learners.
- We are striving towards developing a staff profile, management team and governing body which are commensurate with the above.
- We provide services which are effective in recognising and assessing the specific needs of individuals and in ensuring that the right kinds of support and interventions are provided to meet these needs.
- We will, wherever possible, procure services from organisations who demonstrate a commitment to Equality and Diversity.
- We tackle discrimination, whether direct or indirect.
- We promote an ethos within the College whereby all learners and members of staff respect the views, values, culture and beliefs of others.
- We undertake rigorous monitoring of learner achievement and take action aimed at addressing any equality gaps as per those listed by Ofsted & other education regulators including HEFCE.

- We develop a systematic approach to assess the impact of new and existing policies, procedures and processes to ensure that where there is the potential for negative impacts that they are identified and addressed.

The College will implement change to achieve this Policy through action plans defined within a Single Equality Scheme. The Single Equality Scheme will integrate all actions that the College will take to address each of the protected characteristics.

The College's OFFA Access Agreement will form part of this matrix of activity which will support this commitment and monitor on a regular basis its implementation and impact.

The College's HE Admission's Policy forms another pillar of the focus upon equality and diversity and includes the college's commitment to a fair HE admissions system which provides equal opportunity for all individuals, regardless of background, to gain admission to a course suited to their ability and aspirations. This is consistent with the College's Mission.

Our approach to the admission of students also upholds the principles of fair admission outlined in the Schwartz Report (2004) through being:

- transparent, fair, honest, consistent, accessible, personalised and timely.

The College's overarching Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB), which meet six times per academic year, has a standing agenda item to review applications and admissions to the College and has as part of its terms of reference a particular focus on confirmation of evidence of opportunity for all. As part of the College's focus on the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) the review of metrics, progression and achievements similarly has a focus on achievement for all.

What the College proposes for Fees 2018-2019

Full- time

The college proposes to charge differentiated fees for new entrants to courses in 2018/19 for our full- time HND/C; Foundation Degree and Honours Degree programmes and in this the second year of the newly merged College is influenced in part by historical decisions when the institutions operated separately. It is likely that there will be further rationalisation of fees and consistency across the curriculum offer in future fees with effect from 2019/2020;

- For Foundation Degrees the maximum fee will be £6,300 (those where "in College teaching hours" are significantly less than a normal full time programme, such as Foundation Degree in Business, the tuition fee will be reduced).
- For HND courses the maximum fee will be £6,300.
- For HNC courses taught as a full time course the maximum fee will be £6,300. Those taught part time will be charged at the maximum fee of £4,700.
- For BSc (Hons) Live Sound & Studio Engineering which is delivered at the Wandsworth College site and was subject to a previous Access Agreement the tuition fee will be £9,000, for all other Honours Degrees (including one year 'Top Ups' from HND to an Honours Degrees) the maximum fee will be £7,650. This will be charged to new entrants to these courses in 2018-19. For BA(Hons) Integrative-Relational Counselling where "in College teaching hours" are significantly less than a normal full time programme (with work based learning a vital component) the tuition fee will be reduced.

Part- time

Part time fees will be set on a course by course basis and will not exceed £4,700. The majority of part time fees will be set at a level well below that maximum, in the region of £3,500, to ensure that they are affordable for the adult learner wishing to study alongside work or in preparation for return to work.

All fees will be advertised on the UCAS website and will form part of the Key Information Set. The fees will also appear on the College website and the College Undergraduate prospectus. The College will advise Student Finance England via the appropriate portal.

Inflation linked tuition fee rises

The College may decide to increase tuition fees year on year at a reasonable rate in line with inflation. Any increases would not exceed the Office for Budget Responsibility's forecast for RPI-X (the retail price index, excluding mortgage interest payments). This intention will be clearly advertised on the College's promotional material.

As a requirement of the charging of above threshold fees, the College proposes to introduce the following strategies:

Strategies to increase access from 2018-2019

Internal College Progression Bursaries (First year of study)

The College will continue to offer "progression bursaries" to six students progressing from within the College from a level 3/Access course to a full time Higher Education programme. The bursary of £2,500 will be paid, half as a partial fee discount on first year fees, and the other half as a cash bursary also in the first year. The eligibility for this bursary will be that the applicant;

- holds a firm offer to study on one of South Thames Colleges Group's higher education full time courses, starting in September 2018;
- is eligible to receive student finance (maintenance loan and tuition fee loan for UK students; tuition fee loan for EU students);
- has a household income assessed by Student Finance England (or equivalent) at £25,000 or less;
- has not studied at university level before; and
- that neither parents hold a university-level qualification, or the applicant is a mature and independent student (over 21 years old on 1 September 2018) or is under 21 and living independently (eg. Care leavers).

In the event that more applications are received than we can assist we may also use an academic merit criterion to prioritise applications.

Bursaries to School Leavers from non-selective state Schools with the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames and the London Boroughs of Wandsworth, Sutton and Merton and the adjoining London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, and Elmbridge Borough Council.

The College will continue to offer a bursary scheme available to school leavers progressing to a South Thames Colleges Group's full time Higher Education Programme from non-selective state

schools in the above named London boroughs (this is actually a widened geographical offering covering the catchment areas of the four merged college centres). Five bursaries of £2,500 each will be paid, half as a partial fee discount on first year fees and the other half as a cash bursary also in the first year. The eligibility for this bursary will be that the applicant;

- studied for their level 3 qualifications at a non-selective state school in the above named boroughs;
- holds a firm offer to study at South Thames College Group, starting in September 2018;
- is eligible to receive student finance (maintenance loan and tuition fee loan for UK students; tuition fee loan for EU students);
- has a household income assessed by Student Finance England (or equivalent) at £25,000 or less;
- has not studied at university level before;
- and neither parents hold a university-level qualification or the applicant is a mature and independent student (over 21 years old on 1 September 2018) or is under 21 and living independently (eg. Care leavers).

In the event that more applications are received than we can assist we will apply the criteria of date of application (supported by necessary evidence).

Bursaries to applicants for full time/part time programmes of learning in subjects offered in the School of Creative Industries

The College will offer a bursary scheme available to those accepted to a South Thames College Group full or part time Higher Education Programme in the subject areas of Creative Industries. A total bursary pot of £7,500 will be available and will be awarded either as a bursary of £2,500 to a full time student which will be paid half as a partial fee discount on first year fees and the other half as a cash bursary also in the first year, or as a bursary of £1,250 to a part time student which will also be paid half as a partial fee discount on first year fees and the other half as a cash bursary also in the first year.

The eligibility for this bursary will be that the applicant;

- holds a firm offer to study at South Thames College Group, starting in September 2018;
- is eligible to receive student finance (maintenance loan and tuition fee loan for UK students; tuition fee loan for EU students);
- has a household income assessed by Student Finance England (or equivalent) at £25,000 or less;
- has not studied at university level before;
- and neither parents hold a university-level qualification or the applicant is a mature and independent student (over 21 years old on 1 September 2018) or is under 21 and living independently (eg. Care leavers) – this final criterion will be applied as appropriate to the full time and part time applications.
- This will not be available to South Thames College progressing students.

In the event that more applications are received than we can assist we will apply the criteria of date of application (supported by necessary evidence).

Bursaries for part time courses (First year)

The College will continue to offer a bursary scheme available to students studying on a part time course who are wishing to study at higher education level for the first time. The bursary of £1,250 (of which ten will be available) which has been further increased in value from earlier years will be paid as fee discount on first year fees (eight of these will be available in 2018/19). The eligibility for this bursary will be that the applicant;

- holds a firm offer to study at one of the South Thames Colleges Group's Colleges for a course such as an HNC, Honours or Foundation Degree where study at College is on a part time basis, starting in September 2018;
- is eligible to receive student finance (maintenance loan and tuition fee loan for UK students; tuition fee loan for EU students);
- has a household income assessed by Student Finance England (or equivalent) at £25,000 or less;
- has not studied at university level before; and
- the applicant is a mature student (over 21 years old on 1 September 2018).

In the event that more applications are received than we can assist we will apply the criteria of date of application (supported by necessary evidence).

Outreach activities

In 2018-2019 the College will continue to develop its existing widening participation activities (described later in this report) by the provision of the following specific outreach activities. The activities will focus on the widening participation of under-represented groups within the College's own College community, own local borough, Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, the adjoining London Boroughs of Wandsworth, Richmond upon Thames, Merton and Elmbridge Borough Council.

- Disadvantaged socio-economic localities and communities and areas where there is low levels of participation in HE (as measured by POLAR data) (with a focus on working class white boys and boys schools).
- Non selective state schools with records of lower levels of progression to higher education and with a focus on working class white boys and boys schools.
- Those without a family history of HE
- Mature learners aged 21 years and above
- Part-time learners

Activities to include:

- Working with further education students within the college at all levels to promote progression options to vocational HE study with a specific focus on Access to HE students, students with an entitlement to free College meals and in subject areas where progression to HE is lower.

- Working with relevant local partnerships/organisations to raise aspiration, motivation and achievement including non-selective state schools, education business partnerships, and other career and advice providers.
- Providing internal progression events and an HE fair which will, as in previous years, also be promoted to local schools and, will provide advice and workshops on such things as student finance, financial planning, and with specific focus on debt consequences of study after graduation and career and employment potential post-graduation.
- Developing progression routes from selected feeder schools in the local non-selective state sector into the College's Higher Education provision
- The continuance of the provision 1:1 support for college students (via personal tutors and the College's Information Advice and Guidance team) researching HE opportunities, supporting the making of choices, the completion of UCAS applications and appropriate confirming and signposting of HE progression routes
- Facilitating the meeting with, and presentations from past students who have progressed to HE and those students studying for a HE award in the College (these opportunities to be provided to L3 College learners and students studying in local state non-selective schools).
- Engaging with our partner HEIs through Compact arrangements to facilitate progression routes for College Level 3 students and developing compact arrangements for schools in the local borough and neighbouring boroughs to our own College based HE courses.
- Providing enhanced 1:1 information advice and guidance for late applicants to HE (for College students and students studying within the local borough and those adjoining) and as appropriate additional entry support to the programme.
- Exploring the development of links with local primary schools with a higher index of deprivation to promote awareness, and raise aspiration.
- Working with our HEI Partners on joint promotion activities where applicable.
- Working with Aim Higher London South to house and promote HE progression events aimed at Schools and Colleges in the locality (see later section)

Retention and Success Activities

Retention across all Higher Education within the college has been in excess of 90% in the past three years although the completion rate of our directly funded students for 2014-15 who completed all the assessment for which they were eligible is lower at 85%, and in some subject areas such as Performing Arts, where there is less previous experience of some aspects of the academic rigour and requirements of HE, and in subject areas such as Business where there are lower academic entry requirements, this completion rate is lower. The college will continue to enhance the support students from the widening participation cohorts receive with the following activities. This will be a further development of activity than in the past:

- Applicants meeting the minimum entry criteria are interviewed. This provides an opportunity to discuss the suitability of the course, review individual support needs and personal plans and ensure a successful match of course and choice.
- Students are provided with a 1:1 tutorial entitlement with a named personal tutor.
- The opportunity to create a personalised individual learning plan via the Pro Monitor system (a student performance monitoring system) which will also provide the ongoing opportunity to monitor progress throughout the year.
- The provision of learning materials in a number of formats including hard copy, learning resources materials and via the virtual learning environment (Moodle).

- Induction and progression programmes prepare students for new learning experiences and the changes in the demand of courses at different levels.
- Close monitoring of attendance patterns and the follow up of unexplained absences by personal tutors via a variety of media.
- Provision of Student Support services including academic skills workshops.

The College intends to continue to uplift this level of support in 2018-19 augmenting the support already provided and positively commented upon in the most recent College QAA HE Review (March 2014):

- *“There are effective mechanisms for the identification and support of students with disabilities and specific learning needs, which afford equality of opportunity for all learners. Students with specific learning needs are identified through the application process and support is made available for them through the College Additional Learning Support team.”*
- *“Students are able to monitor their progress and academic development through constructive feedback on assessment, tutorials and regular contact with teaching staff. Students speak highly of the quality of teaching and the support provided by the College. Students respect their teachers and are appreciative of the access they have to them out of timetabled contact hours.”*
- *“Tutorial support is valued by staff and students.”*
- *“Students are supported in their transition into higher education and an increasing number of students who study further education programmes at the College progress to higher education programmes. These students receive effective support and student retention, progression and achievement is good.”*
- *“Factors contributing to the positive judgement in respect of the quality of learning opportunities include that the quality of learning opportunities and teaching practices is systematically reviewed; students speak highly of the quality of teaching and the support provided by the College; students are supported in their transition to higher education, develop well and data shows good progression and achievement; and that the College provides and promotes opportunities for student engagement across a range of activities both formal and informal.”*

Summary of Planned OFFA expenditure 2018-19

The planned expenditure for 2018/19 detailed below shows;

- An uplift in total expenditure from Kingston College’s 2017/18 plan due to an increase in the number of students in above basic tuition fee categories as a result of the merger of three colleges into the new one.
- Whilst there is an uplift in expenditure value on financial support to provide support now to three cohorts of HE learners at three centres the percentage of higher fee income being used in this has reduced from 19.6% and represents;
- a shift of focus to student success and progression activities in line with OFFA strategic guidelines.

| | |
|--|--|
| 2018-19 | £ |
| Access expenditure | 5,500 (1.8% of Higher fee income) |
| Student success expenditure | 14,000 (4.5% of Higher fee income) |
| Progression expenditure | 8,000 (2.6% of Higher fee income) |
| Expenditure on financial support Comprising Bursaries of; £35,000 for full time students with household residual incomes up to £25,000 £12,500 for part time students with household residual incomes up to £25,000 £10,000 Hardship funds for all students | 57,500 (18.4% of Higher fee income) |
| Total | 85,500 (27.1% of Higher fee income) |

Kingston Academy

Kingston College is a partner to the Kingston Education Trust which established the Kingston Academy and is described on its website as;

“The Kingston Academy is a co-educational, non-selective, non-faith secondary free school which first opened its doors to Year 7 pupils in September 2015. It was set up by the Kingston Educational Trust, a partnership between Kingston University, Kingston College and Royal Borough of Kingston. The over-riding aim of the school is to provide our pupils with an outstanding education and, in line with our school motto, to go beyond what schools ordinarily do.”

The website proceeds to provide further explanation of the development of inception and development of the school and the role of the College in that – *“The Kingston Academy has been set up by the Kingston Education Trust (KET), a partnership between Kingston University, Kingston College and ‘Achieving for Children’, Kingston Council. KET’s three partners have substantial and successful experience of the strategic leadership and day to day management of educational institutions. The values and skills of the partners ensure that KET contributes to enhancing the diversity and quality of education at The Kingston Academy. The structure of our Governing Body reflects this enviable partnership (The Chair of the Trust Board is the South Thames College Group Principal and two other College members of staff also sit on the Trust Board and a range of specialist committees).*

The links with Kingston University and Kingston College as well as other industry partners provide opportunities to enrich the learning experience for The Kingston Academy student. These enhanced experiences are provided both in and out of the classroom and will meet the requirements of all learners”.

The College’s contribution to the School, in addition to its involvement with the establishment of the Trust and ongoing governance, will include an exchange of experiences with College students for example visiting the School and supporting pupils in the safe and effective use of ICT systems and

the internet and the wider development of study skills, and pupils from the school visiting the college to develop skills in catering.

Whilst a significant aim of the College 's involvement with the School will be to raise aspiration and to ensure that as new entrants to the school approach their FE/HE choices they are fully informed and aware of choices (with a particular focus on those from areas of lower HE representation) there will also be a focus upon raising outcomes and achievements.

The College will support the School's aspirations for its pupils to achieve a "flightpath" that is one level above the minimum expected achievement based on entry achievement data and/or prior achievement in earlier school years.

Milestones for 2018-19

This is the fourth year of the College operating an Access Agreement [and the second year of the now dissolved South Thames College's Agreement which has been subsumed into this merged College's agreement]. The milestones set are a little different from those set previously to ensure they are consistent with OFFA guidelines and also to recognise the changed internal situation of the merger of the three colleges outlined earlier and apply a number of the widening participation principles across the extended organisation. For some milestones such as participation by students from ethnic minorities the College is already significantly above sector benchmarks. Given the continuing challenges (both perceived and real) of the new HE funding methodology and tuition fees of very significant amounts, the college will be focussed on maintaining its good performance in some areas and developing its performance elsewhere.

1. Maintain the percentage of HE students from an ethnic minority background (circa 56% non-British). There will be a specific focus on BME learners.
2. Identify across the extended college catchment area five target areas where white males from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and areas of participation rates in HE are lower than national averages which will contribute to an increase in the number of students joining College HE courses from disadvantaged/low participation post codes (measured by POLAR classification and numbers of students derived from localities in quintiles 1 and 2) by 9 percentage points annually.
3. Increase the number of students progressing internally within the College to its own HE provision by 10 percentage points annually.
4. Increase the percentage of disabled students studying on College HE courses by 15 percentage points annually.
5. Increase the number of Level 3 students from the College progressing to study HE [at any institution] by 4 percentage points annually.
6. Maintain the support to, and influence upon the Kingston Academy to ensure that as new entrants to the school approach their FE/HE choices they are fully informed and aware of choices (with a particular focus on those from areas of lower HE representation) and support the School's aspirations for its pupils to achieve a "flightpath" that is one level above the minimum expected achievement based on entry achievement data and/or prior achievement in earlier school years.
7. Extend partnership working with AimHigher London South to cover the entirety of catchment area of the enlarged college and establish engagement with 10 new schools with lower HE participation rates and positively influence the awareness of the range of HE progression opportunities available (this uplift in awareness to be measured by pupil survey activity following the school events - compared to prior knowledge) .

8. Across the new and extended College develop an attractive course offering for mature/adult learners to compliment the improved funding/loan opportunities that will be available and Increase the number of mature learners (aged 21+) studying for a part time (HNC/Foundation Degree/PGCE.DTLLS HE award at the College) by 7.5 percentage points annually.
9. Ensure across the new and extended college the application of consistent and accessible academic and other support services for HE learners to limit non continuation rates to a maximum of 11% and increase the percentage of students "completing their study in their intended year" to a minimum of 89%.
10. An increase in the percentage of students progressing into positive employment/further studies destinations to 88%. These two milestones represent the College's increased commitment and focus on success and progression.
11. Working with HE partners, the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and others to increase the awareness and take up of degree apprenticeship opportunities (a progression of a minimum of 20 students to degree apprenticeships in 2018/19) and to support this, the College will develop and start delivery of a minimum of 5 degree apprenticeship courses, also by 2018/19.

Current and standard practices that will build on in the above proposed strategies are as follows:

Admissions

The College Group continues to be responsive to the changing HE landscape by making full use of its UCAS membership for application purposes, managing the new student loan system for its directly funded learners and developing a bespoke HE admissions policy. Being part of a nationally recognised body raises the profile of the College's application process. More so, this enhances the monitoring of fair admissions centrally within the College.

In addition, the College is an active member of the community of best practice for HE in FE admissions' run in conjunction with Supporting Professionalism in Admissions (SPA) and the Association of Colleges (AoC).

With the increase in course costs, it is anticipated that more and more students will be living locally, so the College will be playing an ever increasing role in the participation of the local community in further and higher education including particularly those with lower levels of participation.

Marketing

The College's marketing strategy for HE is not purely locally based and marketing for Higher Education courses involves a wide range of promotional activities including: the website, e-marketing, promotional videos, HE Apps, Hot Courses, social media, pan-London and National press, and radio advertising. UCAS also actively encourages participation locally, nationally and internationally.

Email marketing campaigns are targeted at local schools and 6th forms, past students and enquirers to encourage progression into HE and access opportunities to Higher Education.

The HE page of the College website (titled the Undergraduate page) has a visual identity tailored to the HE audiences. The website is compliant with BS8878 Web Accessibility Code of Practice which ensures the following groups can navigate the website:

- Dyslexia sufferers
- Those with English as a second language
- Those with colour blindness
- Those who are deaf and hard of hearing and use a personal reader
- Epilepsy

In particular, the College provides opportunities for young people and adults in the local communities, particularly those for whom university-level education might not be an automatic choice, to access higher education programmes in a supportive but rigorous learning environment. For example, the College has a large foundation year zero programme and a growing Access to HE provision. Both of these ranges of courses open the HE door to non-traditional students on successful completion of these courses.

The HE experience

The nature of the HE experience is very different from that provided by a university. College progressing HE students have built up confidence in the College and with their lecturers. Some HE students would find entry to a university prohibitive in terms of their confidence levels and the sheer numbers who attend those institutions.

Having accessed the College at FE level, a student successfully completing a course at the College may wish to internally progress to HE courses at the College.

The College is well-placed and has a crucial role to play in responding to the skills agenda in the development of a higher education system that meets the growing needs of the learning society and increases the opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds to participate. It is also part of the College's commitment to widening access to higher education in the local community.

Notably the College has maintained, and continues to pursue the addition of new Foundation Degrees to its higher education portfolio in response to the Government's widening participation initiative. Those that Kingston College offers to employees of the Early Years Sector (a suite of four Foundation Degrees offered in a core and three specialist related subject areas) have benefited from reduced tuition fees as a direct result of the influence of the College upon its franchised partner in acknowledging the modest levels of pay earned in this sector. Even for those fully qualified many of these learners are apprehensive of the prospect of long term debt and some are also acutely aware of the need to support the ambitions of their aspiring children to university education.

In support of the College's widening participation agenda, lower costs, tutorial support, progression possibilities, smaller classes, good transport links, good links with industry, all contribute to the HE profile offered by the College.

Widening participation

The widening participation agenda at the College is partly represented by the variety of courses on offer and the diversity of the students. Opportunities for progression to HE are broad and diverse, ranging from academic GCE A' levels to vocational BTECS, Access and Foundation year programmes.

In addition, a broad range of work-based and professional courses are run as part-time, evening and weekend deliveries and attract returners to study from among the over twenty five demographic. Short course provision (such as ESOL and EFL) offers adult returners access to skills

and learning, while encouraging life-long learning through progression. The provision of work-based skills courses provide employers with better skilled and qualified employees. The College also has a growing apprenticeship portfolio that multiplies the skills building opportunities and employability opportunities offered.

To facilitate progression opportunities for students to move successfully from schools, through college and into higher education, the College has a number of projects, some developed in-conjunction with partner HEIs, to support effective entry to higher education at the College, or to other higher education institutions.

Outreach

The College has developed and delivers a broad range of outreach activities which aim to raise awareness of the HE opportunities for non-traditional HE students. Engaging with key target cohorts and delivering motivational and pragmatic skills sessions that improve independent learning skills has been central to these initiatives, as well as the opportunity to discover information about compacts and progression accords with local HEIs..

Students from higher education courses in the College, also participate in community-based projects, including local dance and drama festivals, competitions and working with 'at-risk' students as role models for a local pupil referral unit (Anstee Bridge).

AimHigher London South (AHLS)

The College has always actively engaged with the Aimhigher agenda and has both raised student aspirations and facilitated the achievement of those aspirations. At the centre of this is the College's continuing membership of the Aimhigher London South network (details of which appear in the table below). As a member, the College engages in activities designed to ensure fair access and support the progression onto Higher Education for young people from non-traditional backgrounds.

The College contributes to AimHigher London South financial as a member and contributes to its leadership and organisation with the College's Director for Student Services sitting on the organisation's strategic committee and the College's Marketing Manager on its operations committee.

Aimhigher London South Ltd works to ensure fair access to higher education for young people from non-traditional backgrounds. This is achieved by linking schools, colleges, universities and education providers together to work effectively. AHLS works in partnership with 8 universities, 16 schools, 3 further education colleges and 10 Local Authorities across London and the South East. The network is committed to collaboration and works together to:

- provide impartial information, advice and guidance to learners, from year 7 – year 13 and their parents, carers and families;
- support school staff in accessing and engaging with outreach opportunities;
- contribute to the sector's knowledge of best practice at a local and regional level in order to determine what works well and which activities are effective;
- develop and apply evaluation and monitoring methods to illustrate long term impact.

The current areas of focus of the college in its work with AHLS are;

- 1) More focus on long term outreach – a life cycle approach

- 2) Greater emphasis on evidence and evaluation, both to evaluate your access work and to contribute to the sector's knowledge of best practice
- 3) Build on and strengthen collaborative arrangements - either through continuing to invest in NNCOs and or through collaborative partnerships or networks
- 4) Target groups
 - Widen access for white working class boys
 - Ensure that disadvantaged students are aware of Degree apprenticeship opportunities
 - Students with mental health disabilities, Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLD), autism spectrum and Asperger syndrome

As part of the NNCO programme AHLS have developed working relationships with Special Schools in the region. We have developed an initial approach of assessing need, scoping activity and developing delivery with HEIs. We support HEIs working with this complex group of institutions and learners by managing relationships, bringing institutions together in collaborative arrangements, co-ordinating appropriate sustained activity and evaluating effectiveness.

A range of activities such as conferences aimed at Sixth Formers in local schools take place each year at the College. The number of offsite events at schools and colleges has increased in the year 2016/17. The College's developing partnership with Aimhigher London South will provide the opportunity to develop sustainable and long term relationships with a range of member institutions (schools, other FE colleges, universities and local authorities).

Linking London

South Thames College Group have recently (Summer 2017) joined Linking London which is a partnership of educational organisations that work collaboratively to maximise contributions to targeted widening participation, student engagement and success, social mobility and in pursuit of improvements in social justice through education. The College Group will, by 2018/19, have established concrete plans to work with and support Linking London in its core aims of our partnership are to support recruitment, retention and progression to and through higher education.

Progression Agreements.

With the disbanding of the Lifelong Learning Networks, existing progression agreements with HEIs have been less effective in assisting students to progress into higher education. However, the College has recently revisited local, and more distance progression accords to renew progression routes and to explore new initiatives for Access to HE learners in particular and has been successful in some new arrangements for the progression of HND learners to top up degrees at universities where the opportunity is not available at the College.

Examples of widening participation in the College

The Kingston College centre has run for many years a very large Foundation Year Zero programme in conjunction with the College's largest partner, Kingston University. Successful foundation students are able to progress to places at this university.

Historically, foundation year entrants are students who have not gained sufficient qualifications to enter directly into university, so such courses offer an exceptional widening participation opportunity.

Students who undertake the Extended Degree Foundation Year (with pathways in: Science, Computing & Maths and Engineering) validated by Kingston University, progress to year 1 of a wide range of degree programmes operated by the Faculty of Science, Engineering & Computing (SEC) at Kingston University. The Foundation year in Science was one of the first to be set up in the UK and has been operating for over 20 years. With now over 400 students across the combined pathways this programme remains one of the largest in the UK. This course continues to grow in popularity and September 2015 saw another significant rise in student numbers to this record level.

Widening participation is demonstrated in that a high proportion of the students on these courses are the first members of their families to gain places in Higher Education. External applicants to Kingston College form the vast majority of students on the Foundation programmes. Students on these programmes represent a wide-ranging ethnicity and age demographic.

Strong links between the College and University have ensured that the courses are tailored and developed to best prepare students to achieve their chosen degree when they transfer to the University. Recent College led course redesign has led to a very successful introduction of a “capstone” end of year assessment project requiring the design of a poster about a chosen scientific topic which is then presented by the student to University staff and visitors at the University’s site to help them become more confident about their transition to the much larger university for the remainder of their degree.

Access to Higher Education courses

The College has an ever increasing portfolio of Access to HE programmes (see website) that provides an effective bridge to level 4 programmes. These courses are for students with a very wide range of backgrounds, some without prior qualifications, but mostly aimed at mature students. These programmes are offered on a full- time or part- time basis to allow flexibility for working students or students with young families. These programmes are now being extended with pre-access opportunities to further participation and progression opportunities. The majority of students on these courses gain university places at a very broad range of universities, in particular at local universities. It has been noted that students with families are tending to want to go onto more local universities due to difficulties in finding childcare.

Progression

Strong links with partner institutions mean that students on Foundation Years, Foundation Degrees, HNCs and HNDs are able to progress to complete Bachelor degrees. For many of the current courses, the progression routes are clearly identified with a named course and HE partner and the expectation that students should progress (and to where) is explicitly stated (e.g. Extended Degree Foundation Year (with pathways in: Science, Computing & Maths and Engineering)). There is also increasing opportunity for students to progress internally and convert a Higher National Certificate into a Diploma (a range of opportunities in Performing Arts and Sports), Top Up a Foundation Degree (eg. Art and Design), or Higher National Diploma, to a full Honours Degree (eg Business).

Students progress internally from level 3 courses to higher education programmes and this represents a significant, albeit minority, proportion of the College’s HE provision. Progression of L3 learners externally to universities is very good, and as stated above is especially strong from the Access to HE courses.

Careers, Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG):

The CIAG service within the College works to professional standards set within the Careers Guidance Practice Framework. All staff are qualified and carry out impartial careers guidance, embracing the Widening Participation Agenda. Through targeted internal workshops, the team actively promote and encourage students, many first generation, and Black Minority Ethnic (BME) learners to research and access HE. The service offers one-to-one careers guidance to the wider community, many embarking on access courses. Staff are encouraged to attend events run by Access to HE.

CIAG help to promote the Bursary Schemes throughout the year, both within the service and online; they also work closely with school liaison within universities. The service offers information and support around HE employability and career planning which is tailored to the needs of the students. This ranges from building a CV to job/volunteer listings and interview skills advice.

As in previous years the team has organised during 2016-17 a series of successful student finance events to raise awareness of support and loans available to HE students via Student Finance England (SFE) and University schemes. Local banks and a number of universities were invited to explain their own individual schemes to aid students financially.

The CIAG teams have worked with over 1,000 students so far this academic year (2016-17) specifically around accessing HE. Interventions have involved: one to one UCAS drop-in support, specialist appointments and tutorial workshops/presentations on UCAS process/HE preparation, Personal Statements and HE finance.

HE Fairs take place annually at the different College centres and students from local and feeder schools were invited to this event in addition to the College's own learners for whom this forms part of their Inspiring Futures programme.

HE tutors and lecturers liaise with FE lecturers to provide seminars and workshops to level 3 students on: preparing for University, how to write personal statements in their UCAS applications, and the entry requirements and expectations of their HE courses. HE partner institutions also run workshops for level 3 students at the College to help with UCAS applications and writing personal statements.

Student Support Services:

The Student Support Teams comprise a group of experienced professionals who provide a high quality service to all students at all centres offering an accessible service across the week to all students.

The counselling service is open to all students across the College centres. The Student Engagement Advisors and Counsellors offer support for a wide range of issues that arise for students. If more specialist help is required, then appropriate referral to outside organisations is sought. CIAG is also provided through our Student Support Centre.

Additional Learning Support (ALS):

South Thames College Group welcomes applications from all students. Each application is considered individually and the aim is to provide all students with high quality tuition and support. This is part of the College's wider commitment to equal opportunities. Help is available for students who have a learning difficulty, disability or medical condition. The ALS Team is a group of specialist

tutors and experienced Senior Learning Mentors and Learning Mentors. These provide an essential service to support the College's commitment to equality and diversity and to enhancing the learning experience of our students.

Kingston College is committed to providing support for students with disabilities, dyslexia and other learning differences. The ALS Team provides support and advice to students and is available to help with application and implementation on the Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA). Heads of Section have been informed that HE students in receipt of DSA are able to approach the ALS Team to arrange for tutoring on the College site. In 2013-14 ALS specialist tutors provided tuition to twelve HE students in receipt of DSA. This number has been increased to a total of 16 students in 2015-16.

ALS is actively involved in the admission of prospective students to the HE courses in Kingston College. Students who have indicated a learning need or disability on application are contacted to establish their support needs prior to their enrolments.

Resources

The College's HE provision allows for greater differentiation and more student-focused learning and delivery than may be the case at many HEIs. Classes tend to be smaller than would be the case at a partner HEI.

This involves a greater commitment of staff resources and increased rooming requirements. Personal tutors are able to meet with their tutees individually far more often and for longer than tends to be the case in universities. The Staff at the College can become far more aware of each individual student's needs and concerns because of this extra time. All HE Learners have an allocated personal tutor.

The Undergraduate Centre at the Kingston College centre and the HE Study Centre at the Wandsworth College centre

The College has understood the need to develop an HE ethos for its HE cohorts and at two of the college centres are dedicated HE LRCs. HE students have access to e-books and e-journals here. In particular the LRC staff offer advice and guidance specific to the needs of the College's HE profile of students.

The Kingston College HE Learning Resources centre which has been renamed, from the Autumn of 2014, the Undergraduate Centre, and was extended in 2014-15 to an additional floor of the College, includes a "drop in centre" where HE Admissions staff, Careers Advisors, and Student Engagement Officers are available at lunchtimes to answer questions and support HE students. Despite a decline in HE student numbers at Wandsworth College the dedicated HE Study Centre has been maintained and is well used and appreciated by its target audience.

Communication with students takes place online, in the centres and in the classroom. In-depth inductions are delivered throughout the academic year. Induction programmes are structured and communicated to students in advance of use and reinforcement with further sessions can also be delivered by LRC staff during the year. The induction session content is routinely reinforced through information in Moodle courses.

Induction and information skills delivery is regularly evaluated following student and staff feedback regarding effectiveness with considerations of when, how and to whom.

Promotion of independent learning through study skills and information skills sessions and study skills online guides are provided through LRC pages on Moodle. Information about the LRC services and resources are available to current students through Moodle.

Academic Skills workshops with a focus on literacy and numeracy are offered in partnership with our local partner Kingston University and these are planned to further develop in terms of range of support offered and frequency of offer.

The College puts a strong emphasis on e-learning and schemes of work, and learning materials are accessible online by students at all times via MOODLE.

Programme level support: Examples of the high level of support offered to HE learners in the College includes the arrangements on the FdA Early Years, Management and Leadership, and Children's Special Educational Needs and Inclusive Practice, where each student has a work based mentor to help support them through their studies. These mentors are offered training and termly road shows to support their work. A newsletter is sent to mentors to help them prepare for the second term.¹ Previous students are also invited to speak to current students as a way of support and allaying some of their fears.

All programmes and HE students have allocated and timetabled tutorial support and many programmes include additional pastoral support as required.

In the Kingston College School of Business the enhancement of learning opportunities make positive impacts upon student performance. Learners on this course who join with very modest prior academic achievement benefit from the following practices; individual and personalised assignment tutorials and assignment feedback, very effective personal tutorial support, involvement and engagement with work place mentors, the accessibility of the teaching teams to students, both in person, remotely by phone and by email, and design of student friendly timetables. Mature learners are highly motivated and engaged, albeit also highly committed at work and in their private lives.

Accessibility of information

The full range of College policies and procedures is accessible on the College website. Some are for internal use within the College and others are to comply with statutory requirements.

For example the College also publishes a clear Equality Policy² covering age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, race, religion/belief, pregnancy/maternity, marriage/civil partnership and sexual orientation. The policy is supported by the College's Single Equality Scheme.

A disability statement is also published on the College website. The College Student Disciplinary Policy and Procedure, along with the Code of Conduct, deal with anti-bullying and harassment. These are clearly applicable to both FE and HE students. Similarly, documents dealing with plagiarism and malpractice are made available to both groups through the College assessment policy.

The website also includes a clearly labelled section entitled 'Student Information'. This provides pages concerned with CIAG, ALS and the student services made available by the College. Information regarding fees for HE students is also published on the College website.

The student voice

The HE Student Voice has grown from local programme and school feedback, to a more central structured whole College concern. For the past four years a more formal and coordinated approach has been in operation bringing together elements of programme feedback and school focus group feedback in an HE forum led by students. The rapidly growing Student Union also has a dedicated HE officer. This forum feedback feeds into the overall College Student Council.

The key elements of feedback are: feedback from focus groups, National Student Survey (NSS), Destinations of Leavers from HE (DLHE) survey, SSCs, HE representative training feedback, end of module and end of programme feedback and other surveys including cross-College surveys (for example from Marketing, Admissions and the LRC). In addition the Student Lead Representative wrote questions for a survey on induction and enrolment to gather independent feedback.

The College underlines the importance of the student voice in all its aspects, this includes student involvement with widening participation and support for all its students.

Student contributions to College plans

The purpose of the Access Agreement, why the College is submitting an application and the concept of “Fair Access” to HE and “Widening participation” in HE, has been for the past two years discussed at the College’s HE Student Forum. These HE Student Forum meetings were attended by upwards of 25 students of a variety of ages, from a range of courses. The College’s plans for increasing access, outreach and success and retention strategies were explained and feedback and suggestions were received which included;

- The tuition fee level continued to be seen as an important component of student decision making and a lower fee would help some students and their parents who were nervous of the cost of undergraduate study.
- However, a greater concern continued to be expressed about the total amount of debt (maintenance and tuition fee loans) that a student might ultimately have and the consequences for repayment. This was a particular area of concern which the students felt was inadequately addressed by HE providers and other advisers.
- Students also continued to feel that the prospects for employment after university study was another area of consideration which was less than adequately covered by HE providers and advisers and was limited to the provision of statistics with limited explanation of opportunity and barriers. Students were increasingly concerned at the reported incidences of graduates only being able to obtain jobs of lower status and remuneration despite their qualifications and in spite of their significant financial investment.
- Many students reported experiencing visits from representatives of universities whilst at school, but felt that the presentations were rather business-like, “corporate” and marketing orientated and would have preferred the opportunity to hear from, and meet students actually studying at university to get the “real story” (“warts and all”) of life studying for a degree.
- Part time students whilst recognising that their fees were considerably lower than the full time students felt that on the basis of value for teaching time they were sometimes paying more but their personal motivations were strong, the level of tutor and academic support received was strong and thus overcame this challenge. They also explained that concerns about supporting the aspiration of their children were heavy considerations when making decisions about their own study and associated finances.

- Many younger learners were interested in the opportunity for Degree Apprenticeships but recognised that they knew little of these opportunities, felt they were few in number and highly competitive. For many “a university life” experience was still important.

This invaluable feedback from the students over the past three years has enabled the College to better understand student /HE applicant needs and establish additional plans to enhance its outreach activities in the community and to schools and colleges.