

1. PROVIDER CONTEXT:

a. Mission and Strategic Aims

South Essex College of Further and Higher education (SEC) is made up of three main campuses located within the Unitary Authorities of Thurrock, Southend-on-Sea, and the Local Authority (Essex County Council) in Basildon. The College group aims to meet the aspirations and ambitions of each of the Unitary and Local Authority partners by contributing to their regeneration plans and helping to meet the skills needs of our local communities. We aim to provide an exceptional educational experience which supports a foundation for our students' future careers. Our vision is all about 'Changing lives through learning.' 'Our mission is 'to develop highly skilled, active citizens of all ages and abilities, leading to meaningful lives and productive careers.' We have four strategic aims: To 'provide high quality, inclusive teaching and learning which raises aspirations.' 'Design and deliver high quality progression pathways to support student progression and regional skills needs. 'Provide excellent facilities, resources and support for staff and students by achieving robust financial health. 'Extend and develop our partnerships to embed our reputation and improve the economic prosperity of the South East and Essex Region.'

University Centre South Essex's (part of SEC), HE Strategy 2021-25, sits beneath the College's Group strategy and has been written in response to the changes within the HE sector. This recognises that HE continues to undergo a cultural and regulatory shift. This Strategy is designed to signpost, operationalise, and deliver the College's mission and ambitions for HE by 2025, aligning as it does so to the strategic context and direction of the College (as noted in its Strategic Plan 2020-2023). This will ensure active engagement of and collaboration with a range of key stakeholders on our journey. The strategy highlights four key drivers. These are: 'Positively engaging with a changing HE landscape.' 'Resourcing the mission and sustaining growth.' 'Recalibrating the HE portfolio to increase access and participation.' 'Maximising student opportunities and progression.'

b. Size and shape of provision

The Communities We Serve

The Unitary Authorities of Thurrock, Southend-on-Sea, and the Local Authority (Essex County Council) in Basildon have seen an increase in population with a further increase expected over the coming years. In terms of ethnicity, Southend-on-Sea and Basildon have a similar picture. Both have a population of around 91% white residents, approximately 2% black/black African and 1% Asian. In terms of 'Other' ethnicities Southend-On-Sea is slightly lower with all other ethnicities at 4%, compared to Basildon with 5.2% other ethnicities. Thurrock has 84% white residents, approximately 7.4% black/black African, 2.2% Asian, 2.2% and 5.2% other ethnicities. All areas have seen a rise in unemployment and deprivation since the pandemic. In terms of educational

attainment all areas are below the average for qualifications between level 4 to level 6. For example, in Southend-on-Sea, only 26% have a level 6 degree, this is 7% below the national average. Thurrock has 20%, which is 13% below and Basildon has 23%, 10% below the average expectation. There is also a significant issue with only an average of around 6.5% holding level 4 and 5 technical qualifications. The lack of skills at these levels are creating skills gaps and resulting in a dichotomy where there is growing unemployment on the one hand and an increasing number of unfilled vacancies on the other. The College aims to bridge the skills gaps. By collaborating with its partners, it creates talent pipelines to the future, thereby providing wider opportunities, and supports the regeneration of the local areas it serves.

Student Population

University Centre South Essex attracts around six hundred students a year onto higher level learning. 78% of students that study with us are recruited from the local areas. The majority are from non-traditional backgrounds with a significant 43.4% from IMD quintiles 1 and 2. The OfS size and shape of provision database shows that year on year, most students, enter with less than average grades to study on degree programmes. For example, in 2020/21 only 15% of students entered with 105 tariff points or higher, and around 56% have lower than average grades on entry. The overall TEF data dashboard shows that 25% of students have a recorded disability. 89.5% of students are white, 4.1% from mixed backgrounds, 3.2% black and 2.3% Asian. On full time courses females make up 71.2% of the student population, and on part time provision they make up 56.1%. However, year on year data does show that the volume of male learners are on an upward trend.

Our Partnerships

The College has developed strong partnerships with local stakeholders including South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), Opportunity South Essex (OSE), local schools, unitary authorities, county council, businesses, and industry specialists, along with major projects such as the Thames Estuary Production Corridor. Employers help develop our curriculum so we may be able to meet their needs. The College entered partnerships with University of East Anglia, (UEA), University of Arts London (UAL) and the Open University (OU) in 2014 and gradually phased out its validated programmes with the University of Essex, where it saw out its final students in 2020.

UAL makes up just over half of all the provision and includes full degree (BA and BSc) programmes

in creative arts and design, media and performing arts, as well as an FdA in Hair & Makeup Design. The University Centre South Essex also runs a HND in Performing Arts, a HNC in Engineering, and a small range of other level 4 qualifications. Our partnership with UEA includes full degree programmes such as a social sciences portfolio with psychology, counselling, sport & exercise science, criminology, early years and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Our education programmes run through our OU partnership. We also partner up with a great number of employers from companies such as The Royal Opera House, Essex Police Restorative Justice Service, Southend Crown Court, local schools, and care centres among many other large and SME businesses who support us in developing and enhancing our courses.



The College has also just become the lead provider for an Institute of Technology (IoT) in partnership with five other college-based providers and will be offering diverse pathways into and through higher education by expanding Level 4, and 5 curriculum in priority areas as identified by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) and local employers in the

areas of engineering, construction, digital, health, logistics and transport. Programmes are set to begin in 2022/23 with curriculum in CMI Leadership and Management and by 2026/27 delivering programmes in all the priority areas.

At the time of writing this submission we are still living through immense changes which include rising unemployment, a cost-of-living crisis and climate emergency. There are significant skills gaps, especially at the higher levels and a digital divide where those with the lowest skills levels are at the highest risk of losing their jobs to automation. On the other hand, there are incredible advances in science and technology providing fantastic opportunities in finding solutions. South Essex College and its University Centre feels optimistic about the future and finding creative solutions, through the design and delivery of high-quality progression pathways to support regional skills needs. We have been extending and developing our partnerships to embed our reputation and improve the economic prosperity of the Southeast and Essex Region.

2. STUDENT EXPERIENCE:

The TEF data dashboard shows that the University Centre South Essex is materially above benchmark by +4.2% on the overall student experience indicator. The data also demonstrates a consistent four-year trend with all years materially above benchmark. For example, year 1 (2019) +2.5%, year 2 (2020) +4.6%, year 3 (2021) +4.3% and year 4 (2022) +5.6% is all materially above benchmark. This evidences an excellent student experience. Further evidence of this can be seen through our split indicators. For example, for level of study, the College is materially above for 'Other' undergraduate courses by +9% at 95%. First degrees are +3.7% materially above and other undergraduate level 5+ at 95.7%, which is +9% materially above. Students reported to have a disability are at +4.8% materially above and students with no reported disability are at +4% above benchmark. Similarly, students from different deprivation quartiles are all materially above benchmark with Quartiles 1 or 2, at +4.5% above, and Quartiles 3,4 & 5, +4% above. This data is testament to the significant improvements made since TEF 4, when the College achieved a bronze award.

Teaching and learning

Our HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy 2021-2025, recognises the barriers, challenges and different journeys faced by our diverse cohort of students. This strategy sets out six key themes that support our evidence-based pedagogy and intended educational gains:

1. A curriculum that is designed with industry experts to meet the needs of our students.
2. Small class sizes that enable personalised, individual attention to achieving success.
3. A learner-centred focus that provides a variety of active learning opportunities, highly linked to student career aspirations.
4. Higher than average course contact hours that support a tailored approach.
5. Sector experienced practitioners that bring the curriculum to life and engage student imagination.
6. Employability and academic skills seamlessly woven through our Programmes.

Since we know our student population is non-traditional, we have invested heavily in making sure we provide excellent teaching, learning and assessment. Based on evidence from the student voice, and our validated observations of classes, teaching and learning is outstanding and significantly improved since TEF 4. Our strong commitment to continually improving our own performance so that we can transform the lives of our students is supported by our Access and Participation Plan and our integrated, timely and bespoke student support services.

Professional development has enabled teachers to focus on the shift from teaching to active learning. The recognition that many of our students have previously experienced disrupted

journeys, faced a range of barriers to learning or disadvantage, supports the planning and implementation of learning. This has led to investment that has provided the additional resources needed, to increase learning opportunities through a more personalised approach, based on differing needs. Our 2022 National Student Survey (NSS) shows that learning opportunities are +5.5% above benchmark at 85.32%. This has been particularly important since the pandemic where the University Centre South Essex has seen an increase in learning gaps due to the lockdown period and higher levels of anxiety.

Staff plan and develop coherent programmes incorporating inclusive learning through a wide range of activities, which reach beyond the classroom. Teachers also employ several techniques to stretch and challenge students from their starting points, as well as provide additional academic support where needed. Outstanding teaching, feedback, and assessment practices at the University Centre South Essex is evidenced through student voice. The NSS results, recorded on the TEF data dashboard shows (all years) that 'the teaching on my course is +4.2%, materially above benchmark at 88.5%, with a survey response rate of 87% of 630 students. The 2022 NSS data shows the College is +5.4% above the benchmark, and this is around 1% higher than in 2021. Further evidence that teaching is outstanding can be seen through our internal surveys. Our 2021/22 survey showed 91% of 310, level 4 and 5 students agreed that 'teachers make the subject interesting', 90% agreed teachers 'are good at explaining things', 88% agreed 'lessons are intellectually stimulating' and 94% agreed that 'staff are enthusiastic in what they are teaching'. During Programme Boards the College also heard positive feedback. Here are just some of the examples: All students on BSc (Hons) Exercise, Health, and Sports Performance, (Year 2 Term 2 of 2022), said 'staff made their subject interesting'. BSc (Hons) Criminology & Forensic Investigation, (Year 1, Term 2 of 2022), said 'there are lots of activities and lessons are engaging'. Students in this group also said 'classes flow well and are well planned with real life scenarios, and industry expectations. BA (Hons) Costume Construction, (Year 3, Term 3 2022), all students agreed that 'they were having a positive experience'. Further to this, staff heard positive feedback about the teaching and learning during the pandemic. BA (Hons) Film & Television Production, (Year 2, Term 1 2021), A student representative stated that 'his class is a small cohort and can get a lot done with the blended learning'. He said, 'the group has adapted well to the blended learning aspect during the pandemic period.' BA (Hons) Early Years & Education, (Year 3, Term 2, 2021) talked about the 'praise they have for the lecturers and staff during the current situation' (the pandemic).

Teaching and learning is tailored to diverse needs and initial skills base of students to provide effective transition into and throughout Higher Education. Teaching strategies develop students' engagement with a wide range of materials. For example, students on BA (Hons) Counselling, during Programme Boards, (Year 2, Term 2, 2022) said they were able to 'link the theory they were learning to practice'. Academic rigour is employed throughout, to provide outstanding standards. Industry experienced teams provide insight, currency, support, and guidance to students through contextualised learning. For example, during a Programme Board a student representative from BA (Hons) Early Years & Education, (Year 3, Term 2, 2021) students said they 'would like to say thank you for all the opportunities that have added to their employability involving seminars and additional short courses'. Students from BSc (Hons) Exercise, Health, and Sports Performance, (Year 3, Term 2, 2022), said that 'content is linked to employability / industry expectations.' High

learner engagement is also demonstrated through the high attendance rates. For example, overall, HE attendance for 2020/21 was 93%, in 2021/22 they were 90%.

Our HE Employability strategy 2021 to 2025 sets out our 'holistic approach, based on the 'Graduate Capital Model,' (Tomlinson 2016), which is broader in nature than the approaches associated with graduate attributes and employability skills. This model helps to develop graduate level knowledge, incorporating technical, subject specific and career building skills during study. Helps students identify a range of graduate-level roles, and changes in the graduate job market. Instils, the capacity to move into and adapt to a fluid job market and build the resilience to manage adversity. Students also learn to reflect on their experiences, values, and achievements to support the development of a professional profile to accomplish career goals. We believe this strategy, which underpins our planning and implementation is having a positive impact on our students. This Graduate Capital Model is woven through all aspects of our designing, planning and delivery and significantly contributes to the educational gains of students.

All Programmes are designed with the contributions of employers to ensure they remain current within today's fast changing world and provide high quality academic experiences for all students. At the proposal stages of a new degree programme and during revalidation, programme teams set up meetings with their partners to make sure they are incorporating changes. For example, there are units in BA (Hons) Costume Construction that explore fabric properties and their sustainability. In our FdA Hair & Makeup Design there is a unit dedicated to developing students' knowledge and understanding of the significance of bio sensitivity and the approach to ethics in a production environment. BA (Hons) Special Educational needs and Disability Studies programme are adapting to include more of a focus on assistive technologies that respond to the fast-paced changes in technology, and the need to incorporate more awareness around mental health. BA (Hons) in Digital Animation is making changes in response to the significant technological advances that will focus on augmented reality. BA (Hons) in Counselling is reflecting the changes since the pandemic and the increase of online approaches. Our Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PgCE) and Certificate in Education courses change in line with legislative frameworks and regulatory bodies. This includes, for example, the introduction of T Levels.

Teachers use strategies to bring their subjects to life and this has made considerable difference to student engagement and enjoyment in learning. This includes the involvement of stakeholders, in planning, assessing, and mentoring students. All programmes embed guest speakers, trips, competitions, and projects as appropriate that consolidate learning holistically and help to stretch students and further develop knowledge and skills. For example, students entered and won the Royal Opera House Prize for technical competence and creativity, and characterisation. We have also had a winner of the Pattern of Fashion Award by the Costume Society. Other examples which promote learner engagement include BA (Hons) Interior Design, where students work on a live project with IKEA and Chelsea Harbour. A representative for BA (Hons) Interior Design, (Year 1, Term 2, 2021) said 'the Regal Kitchens trip was excellent; we had free reign of the showroom and was enjoyed by all.' BA (Hons) Graphic Design students take part in a live brief for Kew Gardens, Estuary 21, and Penguin Books. BA (Hons) Games Design students take part in the Vertex competition, while BA (Hons) Film & Television Production students exhibit at Southend Film Festival and Horror on Sea. While BA (Hons) Fine Art students also have access and strong

relationships with several galleries. Our Social Sciences portfolio also enjoy several additional design elements that help to engage students and consolidate their learning, making them more employable. For example, BA (Hons) Early Years Education students gain additional qualifications and learning on autism, safeguarding and paediatric first aid, deaf awareness, phonics training and maths mastery. BSc (Hons) Criminology & Forensic Investigation have experts providing authentic examination experience. Students learn to search a mock crime scene following the same protocols as in industry. Students also learn to record the crime scene, collect, package and label evidence to industry standards. BA (Hons) Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) students undertake a British Sign Language course. These are just a few of the examples that support student engagement and add to their educational gain.

Employers are also embedded into our existing programmes and function as mentors. For example, on BA (Hons) Interior Design there is a local mentor in year 1, a national mentor in year 2 and International in year 3. These mentors come in three times a year and deliver sessions, one-to-one tutorials, and portfolio support. Another example is students' involvement in the creative design process of Shrek the musical, including application and management of the makeup team. Our students also get involved in numerous internal collaborations which bring all the HE creative portfolios including Film, Photography, Costume and Make Up and Hair together to build their professional portfolios, thereby preparing them for industry. Representatives at a Programme Board (Term 2, Year 2 and 3) agreed that 'Opportunities for extracurricular activities have been excellent, well catered for, positive experiences. The NSS survey for 2022 shows 87.42% of students agree 'my course has provided me with opportunities to bring information and ideas together from a range of different topics', is +6.38% above benchmark.

All programmes have units dedicated to industry placements or work-related practice. Students participate from the outset, increasing their opportunities to become involved in their desired career paths. Consultation between the student, programme team and placement learning team

results in finding the right placement for the right student and strengthens our community links with local providers. For example, students on BA (Hons) Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, undertake 300 hours of work experience, with 100 hours over each year. Students in BSc (Hons) Criminology and Forensic Investigation conduct at least 40 hours of placement as part of their professional development module. BA (Hons) Early Years Education students conduct 100 hours in a variety of different settings where support is provided to children and their families. BSc (Hons) Exercise, Health & Sports Performance students, conduct work placements with different

providers such as gyms in and around Essex. BA (Hons) Psychology and Sociology students work on projects with Southend Borough Council Environment Agency, YMCA school, Volunteering Matters, Admiral Care Home, and Musicality, Music Therapy intervention. On year 2 most of our BA (Hons) Graphic Design & Illustration programme, students conduct 60 hours in the workplace. On our PgCE and Certificate in Education, due to the nature of the programmes, trainees are employed or volunteer in a relevant educational setting.

The College allocates additional funds to bring in guest speakers that inspire and guide students on the next steps in their career pathways. For example, students on BA (Hons) Early Years Education expressed how they have had many guest speakers and they had an input in what they wanted guest speakers to talk about. Complementary optional workshops and short courses are offered through most programmes to add value. For example, students on BSc (Hons) Criminology and Forensic Investigation work with Essex Police, Probation Service, Southend Against Modern Slavery, and local volunteering organisations who support course teams, where the Programme Leader is an experienced forensic practitioner and embeds the working practices of the sector. Southend United and Dagenham & Redbridge Football clubs provide guest speakers at different points in the year. Lincoln City FC helped develop injury modules. Students are also provided memberships with professional bodies as part of programmes to support educational gain. For example, all students are provided with LinkedIn Learning memberships. Students on BA (Hons) Film & Television Production (Term 3, 2021), during a programme Board, said that ‘they had a LinkedIn profile set up with a speaker and he spoke to them online, which was very informative.’ BA (Hons) Criminology & Investigation students become members of the Chartered Society of Forensic Science, and BA (Hons) Graphic Design (Illustration Pathway) gain professional membership with the Association of Illustrators. On our Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PgCE) and Certificate in Education, guest speakers are integrated into the delivery of the programme and include specialists and policy makers.

Our College Employability Award is another example of our commitments to enhancing the student experience and increasing their opportunities after they leave us. This Award enhances student career prospects and personal development by formally recognising the extra-curricular endeavours, work related activities and career learning. It is designed to help students gain experience and develop key skills that employers require. The award enables students to find out more about themselves, explore different options and get job-ready by completing the Award. Points are accumulated as they progress through the award and students can achieve Bronze, Silver, Gold and Gold Plus Awards. Students are issued with certificates outlining their achievements which supports CV building, and confidence levels.

Assessment and feedback

Assessments are accurate, reliable and adhere to academic regulations. Assessment measures are in line with our validating partner expectations and meet sector recognised academic standards. External Examiners make many positive comments about assessment and feedback. For example, on BA (Hons) Film & Television Production, the External Examiner noted that ‘A rigorous internal marking system is evident. These are ‘Comparable standards to those in other UK Higher Education Institutions. The individual approach to feedback was evident, and all the

students were given suggestions for improvement whilst appreciating their actual achievements (2021)'. The External Examiner for BSc (Hons) Psychology and Sociology, stated that 'Across the qualification descriptors and subject benchmark statements there is significant coherence and alignment with the various programme learning outcomes.' 'All students from multiple courses were given adequate consideration, during' [the pandemic]. The External Examiner for (PgCE) and Certificate in Education courses said, 'The feedforward comments are particularly helpful for the students and focus on the key skills they could develop in their next assignment.'

Assessments are moderated to ensure they are meaningful, incorporate realistic rigour, promote learning, and are fit for purpose. Assessment is varied, increasing in complexity, and designed to challenge students. The NSS results for 2022 shows that 83.65% of students agreed, 'My course has provided me with opportunities to explore ideas and concepts in depth', which is +4% above benchmark. The NSS for 2022 shows 81% of students agree that the criteria used in marking have been clear in advance and is +9.65% above benchmark. 80% of students agreed the marking and assessment has been fair and this is +7.19% above benchmark.

Formative activities that check learning are fully integrated into curriculum planning. Applying these through a diverse range of methods prior to summative assessment enables students to build their skills, and knowledge, and has been particularly beneficial for our students from non-traditional and disadvantaged backgrounds. Incremental checking on learning helps to build students' self-confidence, resulting in more enthusiasm for expression of ideas, and risk taking, that leads to higher levelled critical thinking and positive development. Students develop a growth mindset that increases their willingness to work more independently. This is evidenced through NSS survey results which show 85% of students agree 'My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learn'. This is +6.21% above benchmark. Higher Education Internal Survey 2021/22 showed that out of 299 respondents, 83% of students agreed that the 'course helped me present myself with confidence, 83% agreed their 'communication skills have improved', and 83% agreed that they felt 'confident in tackling unfamiliar problems'.

Assessment and feedback are rated as above benchmark by +7.69% on the TEF data dashboard. Students agree they 'receive helpful comments on my work' is significantly above benchmark by +11.27% and feedback on my work has been timely is +2.37% materially above benchmark. This is further evidenced through our Higher Education Internal Survey 2021/22, where out of a 307 year 1 and year 2 respondents, 89% agreed the 'feedback they receive is informative and helpful'. During Programme Boards all students commented that teaching, assessment, and feedback is a significant strength, teachers are supportive and make themselves available, and this has added to increasing attainment.

Professional Development

The College has invested in its staff through several interventions since TEF (4). Its teaching and learning strategy is now fully embedded into the College's core practices and includes the monitoring of staff through 100% observations, followed by constructive feedback and individualised action plans. These developmental observations are linked to the HEA UK Professional Standards Framework. Joint observations, scheduled throughout the year with managers, and regular learning visits ensure a rigorous approach to maintaining high quality

learning and teaching is maintained. Managers also conduct regular lesson visits, to look at themes. Where improvements are identified, these areas are more regularly reviewed through a risk-based approach and the support for staff is escalated. Teachers are also trained in and conduct 'Lesson Study' where specific themes are researched and reviewed.

An Advanced Practitioner focusing entirely on teaching and learning within higher education, helps to identify good practice and support through individualised and group staff development. Key themes are identified by the Advanced Practitioner and managers are integrated into the faculty's Continuous Professional Development Plan (CPD). Staff development focuses on industry knowledge and skills, evidence-based pedagogy, and academic skills development. Validating partners and other external specialists are often used to help keep staff up to date with emerging technologies, skills, and practices.

All staff are entitled to a performance review, which considers lesson observation action plans, and personal development interests. Key performance indicators around continuation, completion and progression are also linked to the performance of the previous year, as an incentive to further drive-up performance. Since TEF 4, fourteen further staff have undertaken Master's degrees. There has also been a significant level of other sessions that staff have taken part in. Some examples of this are, 'Theory into Practice,' 'Thinking & Teaching,' 'Sustainability,' 'Compassionate Assessment' 'Ethics' and the 'Creative, Decolonising' and 'Academic Writing.' Some staff are working towards Fellowship through Advance HE.

Academic Support

The College offers an outstanding, friendly, and supportive learning environment with personalised academic support tailored to students needs through an array of educational strategies. All students are entitled to weekly tutorials, which enables them to discuss their academic and pastoral needs. The smaller group sizes of around 10 to 14 students also means that teachers can spend more time with individuals to provide detailed feedback and to agree improvement targets. This has led to deeper learning and helps to accelerate progress made. There are a broad range of workshops, both embedded into the main programmes of learning, as well as outside of the course to support a wide range of academic needs such as skills development, essay writing, and referencing. Our learner interventions through academic support advisors and peer mentors ensure students receive bespoke advice and guidance to maximise their potential whilst studying on their chosen progression route. Support is readily available either on site or online and accessed through learners self-referring, staff referring on their behalf or tutors booking specific workshops for groups of learners. 103 requests for academic support were fulfilled during 2020-2021 academic year, this increased to 197 in 2021-2022. 91% out of 136 respondents who gave feedback, agree they know how to apply what they have learned to their work. Our NSS data shows that academic support is at 85.53% and significantly above benchmark by +11%. The NSS for 2021-2022 survey shows 89.94% of students agree 'I have been able to contact staff when I need to.'

Physical Resources

The College has spent over £175M over the past ten years on its infrastructure. Since TEF 4 it has heavily invested over £35M, specifically on HE. Investments include £16.4m on a Digital

Technologies Centre in the heart of Basildon which opened in 2021. This houses our BA (Hons) Games Design and BA (Hons) Digital Animation. BA (Hons) Digital Animation (Year 1, Term 2,), students said, 'resources are very good'. At a Programme Board, (Year 3, Term 2), BSc (Hons) Graphic Design, Students felt that 'they have all the computers and software that they need'. Students on the same programme in (Term 3 Year 2) said they 'really like 'the new campus, nicer place to work and is more professional'. There has been an £8m development of the Forum, in Southend, which is used entirely by HE students. All the Social Sciences portfolio are taught out of this building, and this is also where all our student services for HE is based, providing a separate space for HE students to study independently. During a Programme Board HND & BA Top Up Performance (Term 2, Year 1,), students said they 'like having access to the Forum because 'It makes us feel like Higher Education, Uni students. Another £500k has been invested in a £5.5m textiles, fashion, and costume facility, in partnership with the Royal Opera House, Thurrock Council and University of the Arts London. £250k was invested in remodelling of fashion and textiles at the Thurrock Campus. The acquisition of the Backstage Centre and National College in Purfleet, providing industry leading performance and media space, again entirely for HE students was invested. This houses our FdA in Hair and Makeup Design and BA (Hons) Costume Construction, with elements of BA (Hons) Film & Television Production. Students on FdA in Hair and Makeup Design, (Year 1 Term 3) said the 'course specific resources are excellent; we get anything we need straight away'. The College also invested £6.1m on a new Performing Arts Centre at the Luker Road campus in Southend, which opened in 2022 providing leading dance, theatre, TV and photography facilities and resources.

Library Resources

Students have access to a variety of collections in the physical Learning Resource Centres at each campus. The remainder of wider reading collections are located at The Forum public library in Southend, totalling to 3,801 books across all subject areas. The Forum public library is shared between three partners, South Essex College, University of Essex and Southend Borough Council and our HE learners have access to all three partners' book collections.

EBSCO Service (EDS), a leading research database among learning institutions acts as a one stop search engine for learners to view resources available. This is our online library hub that stores records of physical books, links to eBooks, journals, and magazines, subscribed to by the College. Despite usage building from 3,714 logins in 2019-2020 to 4,644 logins in 2021-2022, feedback was that the platform was difficult to navigate with too many options available and students often found this overwhelming at face value. In response to learner

voice, as soon as EBSCO released a new design of its Discovery Service, we researched the upgrade to see if this would be more suitable to the characteristics of our student body. The new design is clearer and thus makes resources seem more accessible to the diverse range of academic backgrounds including those who are new to academic research. The online collection currently comprises of 12,049 eBooks from a variety of subject fields. A survey taken soon after introducing the new online library shows that 62% have had a positive experience while 27% had not yet used the service at the time of the survey because they had not yet needed to. Students commented that the service is, 'much easier to find sources with better search functionality.' Other students commented that the platform has a 'cleaner interface' and 'easier access,' 'searching is more effective,' and 'I am finding more sources relevant to my topics.' For question 19 of the NSS survey, 'The library resources (Books, online services and learning spaces) have supported my learning well'. In 2021 the results were at 55%. In 2022, we have increased to 60.53%. This shows that interventions are having a positive impact on learner experiences. The University Centre South Essex conducted an internal survey in 2021/2022, with all the level 4 and 5 students. Out of 298 respondents, 86% (256) agreed that learning resources assist in their learning and completion of assessments. This is +19% above the survey results from the previous year. Out of 278 respondents 85% also agreed they are 'able to access specialised equipment, facilities, and rooms. This is a significant +49% higher in terms of distance travelled on the previous year.

The College makes effective use of high-quality learning materials, and the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) is also strong, especially following the pandemic where all learning had to go online during the lock down period. This online VLE allows learners to access all the materials they may need for their programme, provides access to briefs, lesson resources, assessment guidance, materials, and schedules, as well as enabling students to communicate with their tutors and programme leaders. On-line Industry and employability canvas pages are set up to support on-line and in person delivery. For example, students on BA (Hons) Graphic Design, (Year1, 2 and 3, Term 2,) agreed that their canvas pages were 'really good'.

In terms of question 18 on the NSS survey, the 'IT resources and facilities provided, have supported my learning well', feedback was sitting at 54% (of 140 respondents, NSS Year 3 2021). This has gone up by 10% to 64% (of 160 respondents, NSS Year 4 2022) showing there is impact against our actions to continuously improve. A significantly larger cohort took part in our internal survey and out of 298 respondents, 89% (264) agreed they 'have been able to access general IT resources'. This is 25% above the NSS survey results and is based on a significantly larger cohort of learners. Our internal survey for 2021/22 shows that an 89% (of 586 respondents), agreed that 'resources were helpful'.

Learner Voice

South Essex College values the views of its students. The College believes that listening to students' viewpoints and involving them in decision making will result in engaged, inspired, and empowered individuals, leading to improvements in the student experience, outcomes, and progression. Our key principles are to maximise the opportunities available to ensure learners' perspectives are heard and responded to. We therefore proactively promote learner voice mechanisms so that every learner knows how to share their opinions and offer a range of methods

to gather the views of learners. Learners participate in decision-making and strategic development as our partners, and we believe this leads to fair opportunities for all groups of learners across the College.

All learners have an opportunity to provide feedback about the College either individually or collectively. At the start of the academic year, HE students form a HE Student Union (SU) and vote in 4 executive officers. Annual HE elections take place and learners can put themselves forward to be an Executive Officer and part of the Executive Committee. These Officers are elected by the HE learner body. Executive Officer Roles are President and Vice President, Access and Participation and Equality and Diversity. HE SU Project Officers, are encouraged to develop clubs and societies, organise trips, parties, and other activities as appropriate and run various charity events and awareness campaigns. The Access and

Participation Officer co-chairs the Student Focus Group and the Equality and Diversity officer co-chairs the Equality and Diversity Focus Group.

Each class also elects a course representative and deputy course representatives to consult with their lecturers and Student Engagement team to put forward ideas and suggestions. Representatives are invited to attend Programme Board meetings each Semester to feedback the views of their class regarding course specific issues. Representatives are also invited to attend the Higher Education (HE) Finance and Audit committee (HEF&AC), the HE Student Experience Committee (HESEC) and the HE Curriculum and Quality Committee (HEC&QC), along with the overarching HE College Education Board (HECEB).

Course Rep meetings are chaired by the Student Engagement Officer with HE representatives from the Student Union in attendance. Minutes of meetings, feedback and responses are posted on the Course Representative Canvas page. Learner Voice surveys take place regularly and the University Centre South Essex participates in HE learner surveys, including the National Student Survey (NSS) and its own internal Learner Survey at levels 4 and 5. This approach recognises learners as 'participants', 'evaluators' and, to an extent, 'co-creators'. The Programme Boards include learner feedback templates that are aligned to the latest iteration of NSS and are contextualised to the annual learner journey across all levels and years of study. Each Higher Education subject discipline also undertakes annual programme/module feedback surveys which feeds into the annual monitoring and review (AMR) of programmes and modules.

The NSS survey for 2022 shows, that 'student voice' is +8.43% above benchmark and student

union is +5.45% above benchmark. The TEF data dashboard shows that the College is materially above benchmark by +4% in terms of the overall indicator for student voice with upward trends. The split indicators for Year 4 (2015/16 entrants) are significantly above by +8.3%. In terms of ethnicity all categories are above and significantly above for black students by 13.5%. 'Organisation and management' is +8.18% above benchmark. This data is evidence that the University Centre South Essex is meeting its aims to maximise the opportunities available to ensure learners' perspectives are heard and responded to.

3. STUDENT OUTCOMES

Student Success

Monitoring systems have been tightened since TEF 4, for early identification of risk. Two types of support boards have been introduced. Student Support Boards, bring together panels of staff from across the College to identify the best ways to implement tailored support for individuals that have been referred. Panels are made up of Programme Partnership Manager, Programme Leader, Learning Mentor Manager and Student Engagement Officer. Others such as safeguarding officers are brought in if needed. This enables early intervention and support mechanisms. Identifying students at risk at an early stage through the tutorial process has increased the potential for interventions to have a better impact and has significantly helped students to stay on track and achieve their full potential. For example, during one Support Board for a learner the board found that a student that had been identified as at risk due to her attendance, was struggling to attend. This led to adaptations that enabled the student to complete successfully. This was noted as a positive response through the internal survey for this course in .

Programme Support Boards bring together Portfolio Managers, Programme Leaders, and teachers to assess the support needs of the course that has been identified as at risk. These allow for a drill down and more forensic evaluation of issues so that appropriate interventions can take place. Action plans with clear outcome measures are agreed with course teams and are closely monitored. This is proving to have a positive impact on continuation, attainment, and completion.

Widening Participation

South Essex College has a longstanding commitment to widening participation, equality and diversity and supporting students and therefore undertakes a range of different interventions, this is highlighted in the University Centre, South Essex, Theory of Change model. To improve the quality of opportunity the College undertakes a range of projects aimed at various stages of the student life cycle. Projects are run to support students even before they enter higher education; for example, through a reading mentor programme, Higher education students support primary school students to improve their reading ability. This programme has been running since TEF 4 and in 2021/22 students worked with at 5 different primary schools and increased the reading ability of the targeted students. The Transition programme supports applicants with the transition to higher education through a series of 4 sessions, each running for 3 hours, covering topics such as critical thinking, active and passive learning. This programme improves the confidence of the students and helps to ensure a successful transition into HE. There are also a range of success and progression

projects that will be covered in more detail later in this submission. A student representative stated that the 'APP (Access and Participation Plan) Project (a project which allows more time to be spent with students to provide extra support) has been the most helpful thing ever had. Someone to contact and give a fresh overview, and found the 1:1s so vital and helpful'. Another student representative commented that the APP project has 'been so helpful, it gives a fresh pair of eyes, someone able to give guidance and supply different resources.

The College has been committed to improving equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups and has agreed targets to access, achieve in and progress from higher education.

Access targets

University Centre South Essex has an access target to reduce the participation gap on undergraduate programmes for students from Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintile 1. Our baseline in 2018/19 was 2% and our target is to reduce the participation gap to 0% by 2025/26. However, this targets has already been surpassed and in 2021/2022 there was a positive gap. This is due to the number of students in quintile 1, exceeding those from IMD quintile 5 by 7.7%.

Success targets

In terms of success the College has six targets to reduced attainment gaps.

Success Targets	Internal Milestones
To reduce the attainment gap for BAME students on undergraduate programmes from 30% in 2018/19 to 18% in 2025/26.	This target has already been hit. In 2021/22, our internal data shows that instead of meeting our milestone target of a reduction to 28%, the reduction is now down to an 18% gap.
To raise the attainment rate for BAME students from deprivation quintiles 1 and 2 on undergraduate programmes from 31% in 2018/19 to 46% by 2025/26.	The college is well on its way to meeting this target. A milestone of 34% attainment was surpassed and attainment was raised to 37%. This shows the interventions in this area are having a positive impact.
To reduce the attainment gap for BAME students aged over 21 on undergraduate programmes from a baseline of 51% in 2018/19 to 25% in 2025/26.	There was a milestone target to reduce the attainment gap to 46% in 2012/22. This milestone has been surpassed and the gap reduced to 33%
To reduce the attainment gap for students from deprivation quintile 1 from a baseline of 10% in 2018/19 to 6% by 2025/26.	The milestone target for 2021/22 was to reduce the attainment gap to 9.5% and the College has achieved a reduction to 5%

Success Targets	Internal Milestones
To reduce the attainment gap for students from deprivation quintile 2 from 10% baseline in 2018/19 to 6% in 2025/26.	There was a milestone target to reduce the attainment gap to 9.5% in 2020/21. This was reduced to 2%.
To reduce the attainment gap for female students from deprivation quintiles 1 or 2 from 19% baseline in 2018/19 to 8% in 2025/26.	There was a milestone target of 17% in 2021, however this attainment gap was reduced to 1%.

These figures highlight how the College is making very good progress since we have surpassed all our success milestone targets.

Continuation

The College's continuation rates are broadly in line with the benchmark at 83.3% on the TEF data dashboard. Most split indicators are also broadly in line with the benchmark. In terms of subject areas all courses are broadly in line with the benchmark, except for computing which is significantly above the benchmark. Continuation dipped slightly for Year 4 full time, students entering in 2019/20 which, we believe to be due to the pandemic. The College strongly believes that the positive continuation rates are as a direct result of the combination of strategies employed. These specifically include the progress made in teaching and learning, where there this submission has already demonstrated excellent assessment and feedback, the close monitoring of at-risk learners and the strong support mechanisms employed to help students overcome their barriers to success.

Completion

The aggregated picture for completion shows the College to be below the benchmark by

-3.4%. The College recognises this and has made year on year improvements. This can be seen when we take a deeper look at the split matrix. There is an upward trajectory, where the University Centre South Essex has moved from -5.6 below the benchmark for 2013/14 entrants (Year1), to -4.9% for entrants in 2015/16 (Year 3), to +1.7% at 79.5% for 2016-17 entrants (year 4). The College is continuing to improve its completion rates for students. Internal data for 2018/19 entrants is projecting another increase. This is a significant improvement since TEF 4, and the College believes that the positive impact on completion is because of all the strategies and interventions it has put into place.

In taking a closer look at the split matrix, Other undergraduate courses are broadly in line with the benchmark at 77.7%, while first degrees are under benchmark by 6%. Once again, we believe that there is an upward trajectory and the interventions put into place to support students complete are having a positive impact and can be seen when we view the later year 3 and year 4 provision. The same can be said for other undergraduate Level 4 and Level 5 courses.

In terms of ethnicity the College performs well with all ethnic groups and the TEF data dashboard shows white students make up most learners with 1,180, and at 88%. These learners are materially below by 5.5%. However, we believe that if we take account of the upward trajectory

in year 4, this is an improving picture. Completion rates for all other ethnic groups are either materially within or above the benchmark. The interventions we have in place along with the ring-fenced finances to support students will continue to have a positive impact.

When we look at completion rates at a subject level. Our Creative, Arts and Design portfolio which recruits around half the provision, with a denominator of 540, is broadly in line with the benchmark, with an indicator of 85.4%. It is our belief that all courses have improved since 2013/14 (Year 3) and those that moved across to our new validating partner are all performing at least to the OfS benchmark or above.

Successful Progression

Overall progression rates for South Essex College are outstanding and materially above benchmark by +4.7% at 65%. There was a dip for year 2 to 59%. This improved again for year 3 to 67.5% and materially above benchmark by +5.6%. Students undertaking first degree programmes do the best and are materially above the benchmark by +6.8%. There is more to do in terms of progression rates for other undergraduates undertaking level 5+ studies. It should be noted that in terms of ratios there are significantly less students undertaking Level 5+ (30) than first degrees (270) and so the College will be reviewing this group of students who are considered to belong to the HND Performing Arts. There is now a much more focused support provided for these groups of students undertaking these courses. This is being implemented through the Support Boards that were discussed earlier within this submission. BSc (Hons) Criminology (Year 3 Term 3 2021) said the 'professional development sessions were fantastic and really supported us and work experience.' Another student said that 'doing a lot of presentations has helped with public speaking.'

The Careers and Employability Service provides students with all the advice and resources needed to support them in accessing information about careers, as well as developing their key employability skills. The College helps students enhance their employment prospects in today's competitive graduate job market by providing them with the opportunities and knowledge they need for future employment and or postgraduate study. We want to empower students to make informed decisions on their course progression and open the options available to them. Collaborating with partners and graduate employers, the Careers and Employability Service offers friendly, professional one to one support and tailored workshops to undergraduates and graduates. For example, the evaluation of an assessment day delivered in 2021 supported students with group exercises, presentations, and mock interviews. An evaluation report of the day found that out of students that took part, 89% would recommend the experience again. Out of students that took part in a 'laughter academy', 93% agreed or strongly agreed that their employment chances had improved. 90% said their teamworking skills had improved and () 88% said their communications skills had improved.

Exit surveys aim to meet students' progression needs. For example, an exit survey conducted in March 2022, where students were able to answer multiple options, out of respondents, () 67.5% said they felt access to an online careers platform for two years would be beneficial. () 47% said they would like talks from industry experts, and () 42% said they would find employability workshops such as CV writing, and interview techniques would be of benefit. As a

result, the Careers team have developed systems and processes to support alumni for up to two years after they have left the College.

In the same survey, respondents, () 40% of students were either starting paid work immediately, were self-employed or running their own business. (), 13% were going to further study. () 4.5% were going into a management or director role, () 22% into a professional occupation and () 10% into an associate or technical occupation. This equates to (), 79.5%. () 9.7% said they were developing an artistic portfolio, the College considers this as a positive outcome since over half the courses are part of the creative industries building of a creative, professional, or artistic portfolio.

All students receive guidance with our qualified Careers Co-ordinators. This is an opportunity to discuss a range of topics including: careers choice, planning and progression routes. Skills workshops cover a range of employability topics such as CV building, interview techniques and much more. Daily 'quick query' lunch time drop-in sessions and online live social media questions and answers are also available. We offer employability support for students who have learning difficulties, disabilities, and mental health issues. We can assist with complex career concerns.

There are also several events on campus, careers fairs, and networking events. For example, in November the College holds an industry week where students are asked to take part in several workshops and master classes from a variety of industry professionals. Employers can advertise their vacancies to our students and graduates for free via our job boards, exhibit at our careers fairs and reach hundreds of students in one day. They are also able to offer internships or work placements and gain access to a talented pool of students and recent graduates.

When asked during a Programme Board in 2021, BA (Hons) Film & Television Production students said 'Everything around employability this year has been good. "Think like a recruiter," for film and TV was a good two-hour tutorial about the skills for interview and getting into a job." These students also said the 'LinkedIn was beneficial.'

This year the College offered several virtual and face to face sessions such as 'Getting into Teaching,' 'Create Britain,' 'Mental Health and your rights to privacy and adjustments,' 'What if' by Rob Hopkins on reimagining the world and a talk from Ryan Laley from Epic Games to name just a few of the activities. In January there is usually another week that ties in with progression and National Apprenticeship Week. This enables conversations to continue with local employers about the skills needed for future employment, further study, and apprenticeships.

The College received Matrix national recognition for quality of careers information, advice, and guidance in January 2022. Services offered to students was sited to have strengths such as 'a set of Independent Advice and Guidance (IAG) resources that are high quality and enhance the student experience.' 'All staff are clearly focussed on the delivery of an IAG service that has a positive impact.' 'Services are seamless. 'Student Experience has developed still further its range of external partnerships to increase student employability and achieve other positive student outcomes.' Several of the services within Student Experience have significantly widened their offering over the last three years to provide a more holistic service to students. Further to this an internal survey for 2021/22 highlights that out of 284 respondents 91% agree the 'website provides useful information on HE courses' and 88% agreed the 'handbook is useful and informative' and

90% agreed there is 'good advice available at relevant points in their programme'. 86.16% of these students also agree 'I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course.'

Educational Gains

In our pursuit to 'change lives through learning,' the College takes several measures and clearly articulates the range of educational gains we intend for students. These gains are weaved into all our College strategies, applied since TEF 4, and focus on achieving our College mission 'to develop highly skilled, active citizens of all ages and abilities, leading to meaningful lives and productive careers'. This is particularly highlighted, where we identify that 'meeting the needs of students from diverse backgrounds, recognising the 'university experience is not the same for every student,' and raising 'graduate capital' is a main aim, ('HE Employability Strategy 2021 – 2025). We recognise that by committing wholeheartedly to widening participation and tackling social exclusion, our students may need personalised support. Therefore, educational gains are primarily based on tailored approaches to learning. By personalising our service to students differing needs, this often means we work with small numbers of students, on a wide range of projects. We increase opportunities by enabling our students to become more resilient and better equipped to breaking down barriers to succeed. We have therefore, significantly invested in our students through specifically ringfenced funds. This includes £1000 per students for standard degrees, and £1500, for resource rich degrees and £500 for HNC/D and FDA programmes. An additional £1000 per learner for APP projects related to reducing attainment gaps and inclusion, is also invested to enable our tailored approaches to take shape.

The College approach to supporting students to achieve the educational gains we have identified are evidence based, highly effective and tailored to our students different starting points and link back to the Graduate Capital Model and employability framework ('HE Employability Strategy 2021 – 2025).

Graduate Capital

Graduate Capital	Benefits	Success indicators	Graduate attributes
Human Capital	Developing graduate level knowledge, incorporating technical knowledge, subject specific and career building skills during an undergraduate degree programme, which signal to prospective employers that individuals with a degree are operating at a higher technical and cognitive level than non-graduates.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply subject discipline knowledge and concepts • Demonstrate transferable skills relevant to the graduate job market • Interpret the Labour market and search for opportunities • Identify appropriate ways to apply for opportunities • Write high quality job applications and perform well in the recruitment process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aspiration • Resilience • Self-management • Willingness (and capability) to learn • Flexibility and adaptability • Target setting • Goals • Inter-personal skills • Critical thinking skills • Academic writing • Research • Referencing
Social Capital	Developing networks and social relations (through for example work-related learning and associated interaction with the relevant sector and prospective employers) to enhance knowledge and be able to access target employment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a range of graduate-level roles • Examine what is new or changing in the graduate job market • Describe the key influencers in their field • Recognise and capitalise on opportunities that arise • Build a network of career contacts • Create an effective online presence • Demonstrate the confidence to talk to people they do not know 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time management. • Communication skills • Digital Literacy • Numeracy skills • Money management Efficiency • On-line safety • CV building • Growth mindset • Progression to Masters • Language skills • Emotional intelligence • Ethics

Graduate Capital	Benefits	Success indicators	Graduate attributes
Cultural capital	Appreciating the culture of sectors and organisations and responding accordingly by being able to present oneself and one's profile, whether it is through a C.V. Higher Education Achievement Report, LinkedIn profile, etc. or in a way that demonstrates a connection between the graduate and the prospective employer or client (this may include tailoring one's profile around the cultural values or working culture of an organisation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate that they have added value through extra-curricular activities • Select and apply methods to present themselves in a professional and targeted manner (on paper, on-line and in person) • Assess the culture of key organisations in their chosen sector • Demonstrate an awareness and sensitivity to different cultural contexts and an increasingly internationalised Labour market. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent thinking • Opportunity awareness • Social media skills • Creativity • Autonomy • Multi-tasking • Positive attitude • Presentation Skills • Problem solving • Professional knowledge • Social intelligence • Team-working • Work ethic • Autonomy • Customer awareness • Enterprise and entrepreneurship
Psychological Capital	Having the capacity to move into and adapt to a fluid job market and to have the resilience and ability to manage adversity, thereby preparing oneself to withstand challenges and pressures of the labour market and marketplace and be able to undertake scenario planning and contingency planning in terms of one's long-term career goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage workplace uncertainty and when necessary, generate plans to take measured risks • Demonstrate the capacity to be adaptable, able to manage setbacks, changes, and transitions • Establish personal strategies to manage workplace stresses effectively. • Construct career contingency plan(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving and receiving feedback • Initiative and self-direction • Career management

Graduate Capital	Benefits	Success indicators	Graduate attributes
Identity Capital	Reflecting on and understanding experiences, values, and achievements to support development of one's professional profile (an ongoing identity that a graduate present to the labour market or market place, thereby signalling their suitability for employment or engagement); the development of strategies to accomplish career goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify their skills, attributes and experiences and evaluate gaps to be addressed • Evaluate their self-concept, including their values and motivations • Appraise their strengths and areas for development • Test their ideas through work experience and insights • Judge their fit for roles and opportunities • Select an emerging or clear career path(s) • Assess their progress, identifying and recording their learning. 	

We believe that our investments, interventions, and tailored approaches that are particularly focused on building personal development through Graduate Capital is supporting the College in meeting students at their starting points and collaborating with them to succeed. This is evidenced through our strong learner satisfaction in terms of learning experience, our improving continuation, completion, and progression data, as well as all the additional qualifications, memberships and other knowledge, skills and behaviours that graduates gain through their time with us.

This can also be seen through our improving student attainment. For example, our internal data dashboard shows that we had 163 entrants in 2015/16 that undertook a first-degree programme. Of these students, only 15 (9%) had 105 UCAS points or higher with entrants holding A Levels and students holding an HNC/D. 55 (35%), of students had other level 3 qualifications equating to around 60 UCAS points. This highlights that 93 (56%) of students did not hold a Level 3 qualification and had no UCAS points yet, 110 (67%) attained a 2:1 or 1st. We believe this shows strong impact in terms of distance travelled based on the starting points of learners. Added to this, the College recruits a rising number of students from IMD backgrounds, and attainment for these learners are significantly improving. For example, attainment rates for quintile 1 students has risen 10% (2017/18), from 55% to 65% (2019/20). For students from quintile 2 backgrounds attainment has risen from 55% (2017/18) to 70% in 2020/21. The same can be said for the 25% of students with disabilities, which has risen from 55% in 2017/18 to 80% in 2020/21. This evidence shows

that our investments into tailored approaches and relevant extracurricular projects, briefs, work experience and other employability, careers and pastoral support is building 'Graduate Capital' has a positive impact on students from their differing starting points.

The NSS (2022) also shows that 77% (+9.6 above BM) of students agree they 'feel a part of the community of staff and students. This highlights the inclusive nature of the College. 87.42% (+6.4% above BM) of students value the opportunities to 'bring information and ideas together from different topics' (Question 6). 84.91% (+6% above BM), agree their 'course provides opportunities to apply' what is learnt. Our internal surveys also show educational gain in terms of personal development. For example, out of 299 students in 2021/22, 83% agree the course has helped to 'improve confidence', 'communication' and they feel able to 'tackle unfamiliar problems. This is again testament to the educational gains achieved through our tailored approach to achieve graduate capital.

4. COVID: ANY ACTIONS IT HAS TAKEN BECAUSE OF COVID PANDEMIC

Since the pandemic, Essex has witnessed a surge in mental health issues. Figures show that the number of assessments by adult health practitioners have risen by around 50% and referrals to mental health support significantly increased. There has also been a steady increase in the number of HE Students accessing the Wellbeing and Safeguarding team over the past 3 years. There has been an improvement each year in how we make students aware of support services and the recent introduction of a HE Wellbeing Facilitator has meant we can expand our wellbeing service even further. The table below shows the numbers of interactions there has been in relation to mental health concerns over the past three years. From the data it is possible to see that the number of interactions have rapidly increased.

Academic Year	Number of Interactions	Most common reason
2019-2020	210	Mental Health Condition
2020-2021	262	Mental Health Condition
2021-2022	321	Mental Health Condition

Through the lock down period, many of our students faced financial uncertainty, isolation, bereavement, or illness, while having to get used to on line learning and home schooling their children. As a result, many students have experienced a decline in their wellbeing. The College has therefore understandably seen a rapid rise in concerns around anxiety and depression over this period and has put strategies in place to provide a supportive wrap around service. BA (hons) Early Years Education (Term 3 Year 1, 2022) said 'we want to say the support available from Higher Education Team is amazing in terms of wellbeing and mental health'. 'Appointments are easy to get. it is such a high standard here.'

An additional Covid Support fund was quickly created and resulted in an additional £83,148 being awarded to students. For example, an additional £45K was invested into learning resources. Essential reading list materials were also purchased and made available online for learners to access via the Online Library catalogue. Students were also loaned laptops and other software

memberships such as adobe. BA (Hons) Graphic design () said, 'having the Adobe account has been helpful as it is expensive and is a financial benefit to all the students. BA (Hons) Criminology and Forensic Investigation students stated the Lecture Capture, provided by Planet e-Stream, 'was extremely helpful to both students and teachers alike.' The lecture capture now allows learners to catch up on lectures following any absence. All lectures, delivered in The Forum, from the academic year of 2021-2022 were recorded and made available to learners through their VLE. In 2020 we also invested in the platform Blackbullion, which has a large selection of modules, students can complete to improve their financial skills through a library of articles and budgeting toolkits. Just over 50% of our students are now active users of this platform that was initially purchased to support students accessing the College hardship fund. During the pandemic, this tool was invaluable in helping to ensure that the additional government support was awarded to students in a timely way and met their individual needs.

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