

## **SOUTH THAMES COLLEGES GROUP (STCG)**

### **Provider written submission Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023**

#### **1. Provider context – Introduction to South Thames Colleges Group (STCG)**

- 1.1 South Thames Colleges Group (STCG) is a **large general further education college**, formed in August 2017 by the **merger of Carshalton, Kingston, and South Thames colleges**. Under the arrangements of this “type B merger” two of the colleges – South Thames College and Carshalton College were legally dissolved, and their property, rights and liabilities transferred to the successor college, Kingston. Following the approval of the Minister of State for Education in 2018, Kingston College changed its name to South Thames Colleges Group.
- 1.2 Later in subsection 1.15, and sections 2 and 3, **the relevance of the date of merger to the TEF indicators, their application to the newly formed group, in some cases to its separate pre-merger predecessor colleges, strategic developments that have occurred since merger and their impacts will be explained**. Whilst some 5 years since STCG was formed, TEF metrics carry some legacy of predecessor colleges, their decisions, and strategies. **Any assessment of STCG should consider changes and progress made since merger, which are articulated throughout this submission, and the impact of legacy metrics on STCG’s TEF indicator profile which, in some cases, are less reflective of the past 5 years of merged college leadership, operation, teaching and learning.**
- 1.3 STCG is based in **south-west London**. It has college campuses in the boroughs of **Kingston, Merton, Sutton, and Wandsworth** from which it draws much, but not all, of its adult, and younger study programme students. Many students, also including those who study Higher Education (HE), for an apprenticeship and professional courses travel from adjoining and other London boroughs, and in the case of Kingston College from north Surrey. Some full time HE students originate from further away, study away from home, and those studying specialist HE courses commute further for study (see also section 1.19).
- 1.4 STCG offers **education programmes from entry level to level 6 across a wide range of subjects**. During academic year 2021/22 there were approximately 3,949 post 16 students enrolled on study programmes, 9,370 students on adult and full cost programmes, 703 apprentices combining study with work and 608 HE students (see section 1.14).
- 1.5 HE is offered at three of STCG’s colleges – Kingston (where the largest number study), Carshalton and Wandsworth. **Whilst HE is a minority offering at STCG, it is significant**. The Group and its predecessor colleges, have a long 30+ year history of HE provision, 6 university partners, offers courses awarded by Pearson and has University Centre status (see sections 1.16/1.17). Notwithstanding the significance of HE cohorts at STCG, sections 2.3 and 2.4 will explore the impact of small cohorts [in sector context] on TEF indicators. Section 2, for example, will explain how only a minority of students are eligible for the NSS and how the view of the student experience indicators change if the feedback from the wider population is included, and in section 3, for example, how TEF continuation and completion indicators based on a small volume of responses can be viewed with the provision of additional contextual data about changes to STCG’s strategy and historic pre-merger data.
- 1.6 **STCG holds an important, unusual and multifaceted place in the HE sector playing a number of roles**; as a provider in its own right, one of the largest feeder of students to HE

institutions locally and across the country, including many from underrepresented groups (a member of AimHigher, London, and an operator of its own Access and Participation Plan (APP)), a delivery partner of, and collaborator in recruitment to universities, two of which sit within STCG's catchment area, and which are also competitors to some of STCG's own HE provision. STCG also offers a range of Access to HE programmes providing progression opportunities both internally and externally to students at different stages in their lives.

- 1.7 **STCG is an education provider and at its heart is teaching, learning, skill development, and students** – the quality of their experience, their safeguarding, wellbeing, achievement, success, and future progression opportunities. In **February 2020 STCG was awarded “GOOD” at a full Ofsted Inspection**. In sections 1 and 2 the embedding of HE provision within Schools in each college (rather than separate HE arrangements) will be explained, and that almost all lecturers teaching HE also teach FE courses. The following comments from the 2020 Ofsted report therefore also apply to the characteristics of HE teaching and learning at STCG: (a) *“Students at all campuses are taught by teachers who are enthusiastic and knowledgeable and who teach interesting lessons. As a result, students are captivated by what they learn and motivated to do their best.* (b) *Students thrive on the expectations that staff have of them. They adhere closely to the professional attitudes that staff demand in terms of conduct, behaviour, dress code and diligence in their studies.* (c) *Leaders have successfully created an inclusive college where students and staff feel welcome.* (d) *Managers and teachers plan their curriculum so that students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are supported appropriately.* (e) *Teachers benefit from a comprehensive staff development programme. They attend courses which keep them up to date with new subject knowledge.* (f) *Teachers across the college plan their teaching skilfully. They develop students' knowledge and skills in a logical sequence so that they can confidently complete more complex tasks.* (g) *Teachers have high expectations of students to work hard.”* Subsection 1.11 below further explains STCG's Quality Assurance and Improvement Policy and Procedures, and section 2.13 specific HE focussed continual personal development practice.
- 1.8 STCG is also an education provider familiar with external scrutiny of its provision, student experience and outcomes, committed to continuous improvement and **from its first incarnation has voluntarily and enthusiastically embraced the TEF and its opportunity to shine a spotlight on the quality of the student experience, and outcomes, of HE students from all backgrounds and how it continually strives for improvement**. In the year (2017) leading up to the formation of STCG, Kingston College (the successor college) was successful in achieving TEF SILVER, STCG achieved BRONZE in 2018, and STCG participated in both TEF subject pilots. The involvement of HE senior leaders, curriculum managers, teaching, and support staff in the TEF process, their reflection upon practice and opportunities for improvement has had direct and positive impacts upon student experiences and outcomes and assisted the refinement and focussing of quality procedures and KPIs.
- 1.9 This Provider Submission (in sections 2 and 3) will evidence the maintenance and enhancement of the following **strong features recognised by TEF assessors in 2018** and provide evidence and explanations of improvements to features of student experience and outcomes which at that time were less strong. The TEF panel recognised; • *“a curriculum that is focused on the development of student employment and enterprise skills* • *student engagement with their studies with generous small group class contact time* • *a strong emphasis on the student voice through formal and informal mechanisms which has contributed to the development of a greater higher education community* • *an approach to*

*staff development designed to enhance student learning opportunities which includes CPD days to support HEA fellowship submissions • an institutional culture that recognises and rewards excellence in teaching through peer observation, appraisal and scrutiny of external examiner reports. This includes provision of a mentoring scheme to support new academics”.*

- 1.10 **STCG’s Strategic Plan 2021-24 “Growing Great Futures” explains the institution’s vision, and values and its broad approach to the educational gain it strives to foster in its students.** *“At STCG we ASPIRE to excellent outcomes for everyone, ensuring students succeed and progress to great futures, improving our work continuously through reflection and mutual support, INNOVATE to develop and expand the Group, with an active focus on new ways of working, digital transformation and meaningful partnerships, MAKING EQUALITY HAPPEN equalising outcomes, raising diverse talent through our work and including everyone from all our communities, CARE about the wellbeing of our students and staff, building resilience in a challenging world, safeguarding the vulnerable and promoting happiness.”* The Strategy further explains that STCG is committed to *“secure equal ACCESS to students from all backgrounds, ensure structured and ambitious LEARNING towards successful attainment of meaningful qualification, develop CAPABLE people, able to adapt, progress and continue to learn into the future, and sustain a line of sight on EMPLOYMENT and its requisite skills across a broad range of vocations.”* Section 1.12 will explore STCG’s specific HE strategy.
- 1.11 **STCG’s Quality Assurance and Improvement Policy** requires that its lecturing staff have both academic qualifications in the subject that they teach and teaching qualifications. In most cases lecturers also have vocational experience in their teaching subject area. Most of the lecturing staff (more than 90%) hold a teaching qualification. Those who do not, at the point of initial employment are required to commit to completing such a qualification within five years of employment. The College offers its own DET/PGCE to support new employees in this situation. To ensure an excellent level of teaching new lecturers undertake a period of probation requiring the successful completion of two formal lessons observations. All lecturing staff engage in a bi-annual appraisal system that has a heavy focus on learning and teaching, including SMART target setting. Senior staff and learning coaches carry out 'learning walks' to observe lecturing staff, a function that provides regular and informal focus on practice. As a teaching institution, programmes are thoroughly planned and reviewed regularly to ensure currency and student and employer feedback is actively welcomed in influencing assessment practice. See section 2.13 and 2.28 about **STCG’s Scholarship and Research Strategy**, the requirements it makes of those teaching HE and the opportunities offered, including AdvanceHE Fellowship, live research projects, HE targeted CPD days and their positive impacts upon student experience and outcomes. STCG is an active member of Linking London, *“a collaborative partnership of London higher education institutions, colleges and other members who work collaboratively to maximise our contribution to targeted widening participation, student engagement and success, social mobility and in pursuit of improvements in social justice through education”* (between 2018/2020 STCG’s Assistant Principal for HE chaired this meeting and STCG’s Head of HE has been a particularly active member for many years), and since merger STCG made a strategic decision to join the Mixed Economy Group (MEG) of [43] FE colleges representing *“Further Education Colleges with a significant established, strategic and developmental role in the provision of Higher Education...which focus on the complementary aims of widening participation amongst groups and individuals currently under-represented in Higher Education and working with employers to ensure that*

*higher level skills are developed and recognised in the workplace*". These memberships provide opportunities to develop and share good teaching, learning and student engagement practice, and the benefits for STCG HE students' learning experience and outcome, and examples, will be explained in section 2.28.

### **Provider Context – Higher Education at South Thames Colleges Group**

- 1.12 Section 1.10 above explained STCG's overall strategic plan and vision. **It's HE Strategy for 2019-2023 offers a more specific vision for HE and HE students including its ambitions for educational gain which will provide them with improved life chances and career choice.** *"STCG will be an exceptional Further and Higher Education provider, leading our sector in London and beyond. We will do this by excelling at what we do every day: delivering great outcomes for young people and adults of all backgrounds and abilities to make sure their life chances are improved. This will require exemplary teaching, learning and support, close partnership across the region and very well managed resources with sustainable finances. We will make sure that people from all walks of life and all ability levels are welcome here and can thrive. We expect them all to commit to their learning, to achieve and then progress to the future of their choice. We will provide great resources, teaching and support to help them to do so. We will act as an effective partner, working with our stakeholders across South London to help them flourish, developing their work and expanding their businesses with us alongside them. We will engage with opportunities to grow, nationally, regionally and in our local neighbourhoods."* The strategy further explains some of the key elements of successful provision at STCG (which will be explored further in section 2 Learner Experience, subsections 2.16 and 2.17) *"Internal progression from FE to HE provides many learners with the opportunity to study in a safe, comfortable, and familiar learning environment near to home. They will benefit from studying as part of smaller teaching groups having more direct contact with lecturers, in most cases a larger number of contact hours, and the support of a personal tutor as well as receiving good value for money. Students progressing onto HE Courses provide inspiration to FE learners and help raise awareness of progression opportunities in HE"*. The HE Strategy also identifies key actions for the 4 year period – *"(1) Review all curriculum across the Group to ensure that it is responsive and engaging, (2) Improving Student Engagement across all provision, (3) To continue to develop resources and facilities to support a high quality HE student experience (HE ness), (4) To grow HE student numbers through internal progression and widening participation, (5) Review all University Partnerships, (6) Improve student outcomes, (7) Increase Scholarship opportunities amongst staff who teach on HE courses, (8) Achieve TEF Silver, (9) Review the marketing strategies for all HE provision."* Commentary on progress towards these objectives will appear later in this section, and the subsequent Student Experience and Student Outcomes sections.

- 1.13 **The three colleges within STCG** offering HE have long histories of HE provision and collaborative working with partners. All students benefit from that quantity and quality of experience. **Kingston College has the largest cohort of students (76% in current year 2022/23 and, on average, 72% in the years since STCG was formed) with the widest curriculum offer and management, lecturing and support staff with very considerable knowledge, experience and understanding of HE students' needs and support requirements and the effective management of university partnerships to maximise benefits for students.** At Carshalton and South Thames (Wandsworth) Colleges, the curriculum offer is smaller, more specialist, is well supported by suitably qualified and experienced staff and has undergone change for the benefit of students, their experience,

and outcomes since merger. See subsections 1.16, 2.22 and 2.23 explaining those strategic decisions and the positive impact upon student experience.

1.14 **The total volume of HE student numbers has dipped in the past three years**, see table 1 below, partly because of changes in the relationship with some of STCG's partner universities (including in 2019 the consolidation by STCG's biggest partner into a fully 'in house' extended degree of the Science, Computing and Maths Foundation Year Zero – STCG's biggest and oldest cohort of nearly 400 students in its last year of operation), partly due to the failure to recruit students to target in a fiercely competitive market and due to specific strategic decisions taken to end the delivery of courses with cohorts too small to offer a satisfactory and fulfilling student experience at the South Thames College (Wandsworth) college.

1.15 A contributory reason for the reduction in the number of students registered at STCG (and at its predecessor colleges) was the immediate decision, at the point of merger in 2017, of the new Group's management to end the sub contractual arrangement that one of the individual predecessor colleges had entered with a private college in London. This arrangement included the registration of 194 students in academic year 2016/17 on two-year HND courses in a range of subjects, business which was the largest. Table 1 below accordingly includes these students within the South Thames College (Wandsworth) student population and the total College Group population for the year 2016/17 (pre-merger) and the continuing students both in the individual college and Group numbers for 2017/18 and 2018/19. Subcontracting of HE was not a component of the newly formed Group's strategy, had not been undertaken by any of the other colleges within the Group and was considered an unacceptable future risk for students and the College Group, particularly considering the disappointing levels of continuation rates that were evident. As explained in the STCG application to join the OfS register of HE Providers, and in its Student Protection Plan of that time, STCG was fully supportive of the teaching out of students, oversaw the strategies used and shared good practice from the Group. Indeed, there was a comparative improvement in student success in those latter two teach out years. Section 3, Student Outcomes, (subsections 3.3 and 3.5), will explore the continuation and completion rates of those subcontracted courses, and the impact of this legacy and pre-merger decision upon the overall TEF metrics for STCG. No new students were enrolled under this arrangement following merger in 2017.

Year	Kingston College	Carshalton College	South Thames College (Wandsworth)	Total STCG
<b>Pre-merger</b>				
<b>2016/17</b>	1,071	205	412*	1,688*
<b>Post-merger</b>				
<b>2017/18</b>	1,022	171	278*	1,471*
<b>2018/19</b>	947	123	200*	1,270*
<b>2019/20</b>	582	89	147	818
<b>2020/21</b>	525	93	116	734
<b>2021/22</b>	418	84	106	608
<b>2022/23</b>	419	73	56	548

*Table 1 – STCG HE enrolments 2016/2022 (\*South Thames Colleges (Wandsworth) numbers and total STCG numbers include student numbers subcontracted to a London private college in 2018/19, 2017/18 and 2016/17)*

- 1.16 STCG, at its peak with a student population of over 1,400, for the period 2010 onwards was the largest HE in FE provider in Greater London. According to OfS FTE student numbers for 2020/21 **STCG is now the second largest HE in FE provider in the capital**, still far larger than several other London FE Colleges that have been less successful in maintaining their attractiveness to students, withstanding the fierce competition, and sustaining effective relationships with university partners. STCG is amongst the largest 40 FE Colleges offering HE nationally.
- 1.17 **STCG is unusual in that it has six university validating partners**, Kingston University, University of West London, Middlesex University, University of Roehampton, Canterbury Christchurch University, and University of Northampton, in addition to Pearson for its Higher National programmes. Whilst this presents challenges in respect of the College's oversight of compliance and maintenance of standards against the different universities' quality process, which are overcome by strong central oversight of course level quality management (see subsection 1.21), the range of partners provides opportunities to offer students with specialist study and career progression opportunities not available in most FE settings, a choice of partner whose style of curriculum and assessment design best suit the range of learners at the college, the majority having low tariff or non-traditional prior qualifications, which in the case of mature learners may have been studied some time ago. Pearson's Higher National programmes are particularly suited to subjects where most of the cohort is progressing internally, or from similar FE settings and are familiar from their L1/3 studies with the demands of Pearson's vocation qualification style and assessment. Higher National programmes are also offered specifically in subject areas such as Engineering and Construction where there is strong recognition in the industry and diplomats will benefit as they progress their careers. One university partnership has been ended as part of the Strategy outlined in subsection 1.13. Course consolidation has taken place where cohorts had been too small for students to enjoy a quality learning experience. Students have benefitted from increased collaborative learning and concentration of subject delivery (DET/PGCE) where teaching teams, course, assessment design and specialist pathways are best equipped to maximise the quality of learning experience, student outcomes and progression. The offering under another university partnership has been reviewed, programmes with very small cohorts validated under the original agreement have been withdrawn and will in 2023 be replaced by new courses better matched to the economic and job opportunities of the locality.
- 1.18 **STCG offers both franchised and validated (directly funded) provision** including full 3 year BA (Hons) degrees, 1 year Top Up BA (Hons) degrees, foundation degrees, a Foundation Year Zero in Business (and historically a similar and very large Foundation Year in Science, Computing and Maths), Diploma in Education and Training (DET)/Professional Graduate Certificate (PGCE) in Education and Training and a range of HNC and HND programmes. STCG also offers a small range of apprenticeships at L4 + including the Chartered Manager Degree Apprenticeship (CMDA). Fuller details of this provision are NOT included in this submission as the size of provision and number of apprentices is insufficient to permit TEF judgement. The number of courses offered has reduced in the past three years as the Strategic Plan outlined above at 1.13 has been applied. Course consolidation has taken place where cohorts were too small for students to

enjoy a quality learning experience. Students have benefitted from increased collaborative learning, concentration of subject delivery where teaching teams, course, and assessment design, learning resources and a choice of course durations are best equipped and suited to maximise the quality of learning experience and student outcomes.

- 1.19 The **HE subject areas taught are diverse**, ranging from, for example, art and design to early years and post compulsory education, computing, engineering, acting, performing arts and production arts, counselling, and business. The largest subject areas with TEF data are business and management, education and training, design, creative and performing arts, engineering (part time) and allied health (counselling being the major specific subject). In more recent years, whilst they remain important subjects for STCG HE there has been a decline in student numbers for design, creative and performing arts and the composition of the current business course profile, and student population, is very different from the courses producing the TEF student outcome metrics. A much more significant franchised Foundation Year (zero) Business has replaced historic business awards taught exclusively, or mainly, at the College, with students progressing to the university itself for the subsequent 3 years. This was a mutually agreed decision between STCG and its university partner which provides the opportunity for a larger cohort of widening participation students to benefit both from the high levels of support at STCG, and its significant experience of dealing with students from such situations in the transition year from school/college, and subsequently a full university experience having gained the necessary skills during the Foundation year.
- 1.20 The **current STCG HE student population can be divided into four main groups**; (1) students studying for a Foundation Year in Business (who progress for their subsequent three years of study to the franchised university partner), (2) young undergraduates taking the opportunity of full time HE study with modest prior qualifications (often in non A level qualifications) and often from backgrounds with less exposure to and experience of HE study and enjoying the benefit of local study and in a familiar setting, (3) mature learners developing their careers alongside employment with more modest prior qualifications and/or a substantial time gap since their last experience of formal study, and (4) students studying specialist and well recognised awards such as BA (Hons) for Acting, Stage and Media, BA (Hons) Integrative Relational Counselling and Teacher Education awards – some of whom will have higher entry qualifications. All these groups will benefit from the College's strategic intention to provide educational gain, not just subject based and qualification focussed, but by ensuring *"that all higher education leavers have the skills and qualities to allow them to progress into appropriate employment or further study"* and/or *"promote opportunities for students already in employment to learn how to progress their careers further."*
- 1.21 Whilst the range of HE students described above results in a student population drawn from many sources, **the Autumn 2022 internal progression rate of 29% from STCG represents a strong indication of students recognising the quality of their earlier experience, expectation of similar at L4+, the strength of support (academic and other) and a safe, welcoming learning and study environment**, which was recognised by Ofsted in its 2020 inspection and referred to in section 1.7 above. Since the formation of STCG this internal progression rate has almost doubled as students in colleges previously without HE pathways benefit from the opportunity of progression to a local, safe, and familiar institution. Cross group communication, promotion, advice and guidance has also developed.



- 1.22 **STCG's HE Student Engagement Policy**, which since the formation of the Group has created a more formalised and consistent process *"sets out the College Group's commitment to a student centred approach in the provision of its HE"* and explains that *"the College values students in all areas of their learning experience and has regard for the revised UK Quality Code"* actively engaging in a range of activities with students including the appointment of a student governor, course representatives, staff student consultation meetings, student focus groups led by independent members of staff, student surveys (NSS and an internal mechanism to gain student opinion from those not eligible for the NSS), and a praise and complaint process which is overseen by the Group's Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB). Section 2 will explore evidence of the high quality of learner experience from feedback and outcomes of these student engagement activities.
- 1.23 The **delivery of HE, including the planning and management of HE courses is not separated, but embedded**, within the College structure, and lies within each of the Colleges and their subject based Schools. HE students benefit from access to relevant subject and technical resources in each school, cross college student support services and HE specific learning facilities, the impact of which will be explored in section. The Group's deliberative committee structure includes the Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB) providing a Group oversight and strategic function and acting as the conduit to the College's Group Leadership Team (GLT) and to the HE Governor Committee for the consideration of HE student learning, experience, teaching, and student outcome matters [and from there to the full Board of Governors]. The Group Higher Education Operations Group (HEOG) coordinates service support such as admissions, marketing, student supports services and reports to the HEAB. The impact on students, their experience and outcomes of this committee infrastructure is very beneficial, ensures that there is a continual focus on continual improvement of the student experience and outcomes and recognises that HE student learning and support needs will be different from other student populations in the College group. The HE Governor Committee, with members specifically selected for their experience of HE, and its delivery of HE in FE, is a development since merger and offers the Governing Body a more informed view than previously assisting with decision making benefitting the experience and outcomes of HE students.
- 1.24 HE students benefit from the range of services, resources and staff support that is provided by the college for all students. These, plus the specific services provided to HE students, the subject learning resources available to them and the positive impact upon their experience, learning and outcomes will be explained in sections 2 and 3.

## 2. Student experience

### TEF indicators – National Student Survey (NSS) and STCG's internal HE student survey

- 2.1 As outlined in section 1.5 (above) because of the characteristics of their study (part time, one year course of study and top up to earlier study on a Foundation Degree or HNC) the **majority of HE students at STCG are not eligible for the NSS and the feedback on their student experience is not captured within the TEF indicators**. The volume of NSS fed TEF indicators is small and is therefore subject to the feedback from a relatively small individual course cohort distorting the overall view of student experience across the college. The overall TEF student experience indicators also do not explicitly demonstrate the positive impact of merger, and the strategic decisions, made upon the quality of experience



of students studying across the college. These factors will be explored in the following sections and will present a different, fuller, and more realistic overall picture of the students' appreciation of their experience at STCG.

- 2.2 This submission **recognises that the NSS led TEF indicators for Student Experience show, for full time students, four aspects of student experience which are “materially below benchmark” and one that is “broadly in line with benchmark”**. In four aspects the feedback from part time students recognises a better quality of experience, three of these being “materially above benchmark”. It is acknowledged that when full time and part time feedback is consolidated on a student number weighted average basis (see table 2 below) the overall situation is like that for full time students with feedback on four aspects of student experience “materially below benchmark” and one that is “broadly in line”.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE – TEF Indicators consolidated				(FT&PT)
Teaching	Denominator	Indicator %	Benchmark %	Variation pp
Full time	450	82.9	86.5	-3.6
Part time	30	91	87.2	+3.8
Overall	480	83.4	86.5	-3.1
Assessment & Feedback	Denominator	Indicator %	Benchmark %	Variation pp
Full time	450	76.2	80.2	-4
Part time	30	82	81.9	+0.1
Overall	480	76.6	80.3	-3.7
Academic Support	Denominator	Indicator %	Benchmark %	Variation pp
Full time	450	80	82.4	-2.4
Part time	30	84	81.2	+2.8
Overall	480	80.3	82.3	-2.1
Learning Resources	Denominator	Indicator %	Benchmark %	Variation pp
Full time	450	64.3	75.9	-11.6
Part time	30	68.7	82.5	-13.8
Overall	480	64.6	76.3	-11.7
Student Voice	Denominator	Indicator %	Benchmark %	Variation pp
Full time	450	72.4	77.3	-4.9
Part time	30	70.7	64.5	+6.2
Overall	480	72.3	76.5	-4.2

*Table 2 – NSS led STCG TEF Student Experience Indicators consolidated for full time and part time students on a weighted average basis*

- 2.3 However, as introduced in section 2.1, this submission will firstly **explore one of the implications of the relatively small volume of NSS responses included within the TEF indicators**. Following historically good NSS results one Performing Arts course in 2019/2020 experienced unexpected and unavoidable staffing changes, which notwithstanding significant consultation with students and support from staff at all levels, resulted in the expression of student dissatisfaction from successive cohorts in response to the NSS. Conversely, continuation (88.5% - materially above benchmark), and completion (82.4% - broadly in line with benchmark) rates for this cohort were healthy and feedback elicited via other channels including via student focus groups, university partner and external examiner feedback provide contrary views to the NSS data. A later section, 2.24,

will also explain the positive impact on student experience of the industry standard subject learning resources available to this cohort, the collaboration with students on a complementary course, and the research work undertaken and supported by external funding to better understand and respond to this cohort of students' needs.

- 2.4 This submission **contends that the set of NSS results from the course mentioned above is an "outlier" and because of the relatively small overall volume of NSS led TEF indicators this distorts the overall view of the experience of the College's students and does not represent a fair and accurate view of the feedback upon experience from the majority of STCG's students.** Table 3 below provides a view of the NSS Student Experience TEF indicators for full time students **excluding** this outlier course. This represents the view of the significant majority (87% - 390/450) of STCG's students giving opinions via the NSS. Four of the five indicators for different aspects of student experience are in broadly "line with benchmark" with one still "materially below". When adding the small volume of part time student cohort feedback on experience the actual percentage comparison against benchmark further improves.

<b>STUDENT EXPERIENCE NSS/TEF INDICATORS EXCLUDING PERFORMING ARTS</b>				
<b>Teaching</b>	Denominator	Indicator %	Benchmark %	Variation pp
Full time	450	82.9	86.5	-3.6
Perform. Arts	60	52.6	79.9	-27.3
Full time excl. Perf Arts	390	87.6	87.5	-0.1
Total, including part time students	420	87.8	87.5	+0.3
<b>Assessment &amp; Feedback</b>	Denominator	Indicator %	Benchmark %	Variation pp
Full time	450	76.2	80.2	-4
Perform. Arts	60	33.3	69	-35.7
Full time excl. Perf Arts	390	82.8	81.9	+0.9
Total, including part time students	420	82.8	81.9	+0.9
<b>Academic Support</b>	Denominator	Indicator %	Benchmark %	Variation pp
Full time	450	80	82.4	-2.4
Perform. Arts	60	57.2	79.7	-22.5
Full time excl. Perf Arts	390	83.5	82.8	+0.7
Total, including part time students	420	83.6	82.8	+0.8
<b>Learning Resources</b>	Denominator	Indicator %	Benchmark %	Variation pp
Full time	450	64.3	75.9	-11.6
Perform. Arts	60	42	71	-29
Full time excl. Perf Arts	390	67.7	76.7	-9.0
Total, including part time students	420	67.8	76.7	-8.9
<b>Student Voice</b>	Denominator	Indicator %	Benchmark %	Variation pp
Full time	450	72.4	77.3	-4.9
Perform. Arts	60	37.9	68.3	-30.4
Full time excl. Perf Arts	390	77.7	78.7	-1.0
Total, including part time students	420	77.2	78.7	-1.5

*Table 3 – STCG NSS Led TEF Student Experience indicators for full time students on a weighted average basis **excluding** one outlier course (and overall view including part time students)*

**2.5 Feedback from the much larger volume of students at STCG not eligible for the NSS (as explained in paragraph 1.4) provides a very different view of the appreciation of their student experience.** Table 4 below details the number of students responding to the NSS and the number of responses to STCG's internal student survey, which is more than 3.5 times the volume of the NSS. The internal student survey, which is run and promoted alongside the NSS, and launched in the Spring Term, comprises the same questions as the NSS. Students respond and express their views via the same media, online using a computer, laptop, tablet, or mobile phone. The same protocols as applied to the NSS are in place with the internal survey. Students are encouraged and reminded to complete the internal survey but are not coached as to their responses. The survey is created in Microsoft Forms, published on the student learning platform Moodle, and is only accessible by a student using their college email address, ID number and password to ensure security of results. To avoid duplication, the survey is restricted to HE cohorts not eligible for the NSS. A manual check of this is completed again after the closure of the survey to avoid error.

STCG's internal student survey has operated in three of the last four years. In 2019/2020, recognising the value of the feedback of those students who were ineligible for the NSS and the importance of publishing that feedback STCG took part in the OfS led NSS pilot designed to capture the views of students on a wider range of courses. The pilot survey was well received by students with a take up of +70%. Disappointingly, the results of this were never made available.

Year	TEF NSS Denominator (FT)	TEF NSS Survey Response %	Internal survey Denominator (FT&PT)	Internal Survey Response %
2019 (Yr1)	140	72	793	58
2020 (Yr2)	120	69.5	NSS pilot	
2021 (Yr3)	110	80.2	501	38
2022(Yr4)	80	81.6	460	71
Part time (TEF)	30			
Total	480		1754	56

*Table 4 – comparison of NSS student response numbers & % rates and STCG's own HE Internal Student Survey response numbers and % rates*

**2.6** Table 5 below shows the results of STCG's internal student survey as a time series for each of the three years of its operation and the overall outcomes combining the three years. Comparisons are made to the NSS led TEF indicator benchmarks published for STCG (a weighted average of part time or full time has been used). **Student feedback on all five aspects of student experience is "materially above benchmark"** and in four aspects significantly so. This is the feedback of a much larger population of students than the NSS (3.5 times). This submission contends that this provides a more reliable view of student experience at STCG than NSS responses alone, both in volume/quantity of voice but also in the avoidance of distortions created by individual "outlier" course feedback.

Student Experience aspect	STCG internal Survey Indicator % 2019	2021	2022	STCG Internal Survey Three year weighted average	Overall TEF benchmark (weighted avg FT&PT)	Indicator /TEF Benchmark +/- pp
Teaching	82	97	96	90	87	+3
Assessment & Feedback	80	94	91	86	80	+6
Academic Support	79	96	94	87	82	+5
Learning Resources	77	83	89	82	76	+14
Student Voice	78	95	91	86	77	+9

Table 5 – STCG Internal Student Survey Results 2020-2022

2.7 Table 6 below combines STCG's internal student survey results for 2020/2022 shown in table 5 with the NSS led TEF metrics. Again, comparisons are made to the NSS led TEF metric benchmarks published for STCG (the weighted average of part time and full time students has been used). These results which present the "total" student voice available for the past four years (disappointingly and unavoidably excluding 2019/20's OfS pilot for students not eligible for the NSS) present student feedback on three of the five aspects of student experience as "materially above benchmark" with the other two being broadly in line. **This submission contends that these "total student voice" responses from NSS and internal student surveys provides the most reliable view of student experience at STCG, better than NSS responses or STCG internal surveys alone, both in volume/quantity of voice but also in the avoidance of distortions created by "outlier" course feedback.** Whilst this submission will not provide any further revisions of data it is evident that if NSS data used in table 6 was adjusted for the "outlier course" explained in paragraph 2.4, and detailed in table 3, student feedback on all aspects of experience would improve further.

Student Experience aspect	Combined TEF (NSS) and Internal Survey Indicator %	Overall TEF benchmark (weighted avg FT&PT)	Indicator/TEF Benchmark
Teaching	88.5	86.5	+2.0
Assessment & Feedback	84.7	80.3	+4.4
Academic Support	85.1	82.3	+2.8
Learning Resources	78.4	76.3	+2.1
Student Voice	83.5	76.5	+7.0

Table 6 – STCG Internal Student Survey Results 2020-2022 and NSS led TEF metrics 2019/2022 combined

2.8 As mentioned in 2.1 above the overall TEF student experience indicators do not explicitly demonstrate **the positive impact of merger, and the strategic decisions (see section 1.13), made upon the quality of experience of students studying across the college.** Table 7 below compares the NSS led TEF Student Experience metrics for the most recent year 2021/22 with the four year average, and the 2018/29 metrics (only the second year of the Group's existence) and demonstrates significant uplifts in the recognition by students of the quality of their experience in four of the five aspects. A similar trend can be seen in STCG's internal survey results in table 5 above.

Student Experience aspect	TEF Year 1 indicator	TEF Year 4 indicator	Year 1/Year 4 TEF comparison +/- pp	STCG TEF overall indicator	STCG Year 4 /overall TEF indicator comparison +/- pp	Overall TEF Benchmark
Teaching	81.3	<b>86.9</b>	<b>+5.6</b>	82.9	<b>+4.0</b>	86.5
Assessment & Feedback	74.5	<b>84.2</b>	<b>+9.7</b>	76.2	<b>+8.0</b>	80.2
Academic Support	80.3	<b>92.5</b>	<b>+12.2</b>	80.0	<b>+12.5</b>	82.4
Learning Resources	68.3	<b>68.3</b>	=	64.3	<b>+4.0</b>	75.9
Student Voice	73.8	<b>75.0</b>	<b>+1.2</b>	72.4	<b>+2.8</b>	72.4

Table 7 – Comparison of NSS led TEF Student Experience metrics for the most recent year 2021/22 with the overall four year average, and the 2019/20 metrics

### Student Experience – other forms of feedback and evidence of quality

2.9 Paragraphs below will **explore further evidence and feedback about the quality of the five aspects of student experience at STCG** – teaching, assessment and feedback, academic support, learning resources and student voice. They will draw upon student focus group feedback, student contributions specifically for this TEF submission, feedback from external examiners/assessors, university partners and other external groups including employers.

2.10 COVID-19 placed extraordinary demands upon all institutions and students. Analysis of External Examiner (EE) Reports provides independent evidence of the speed, and flexibility of the STCG response and the positive impact upon students' learning experience and outcomes. The feedback below relates to three of STCG's subject areas with the largest volume of students, 87% of total population– Creative Arts, Education and Business.

*"Both staff and students have dealt with the continuing COVID-19 situation in an exemplary manner. For example, when access to campus and studio/workshop facilities had to be curtailed the Art & Design team compensated for this with weekly face to face and group workshop activity via virtual platforms. The extent and professionalism of this much needed extra support work was fully appreciated by the students and commented upon during my meeting with them. In my opinion the level of staff contact was over and above that given at many other Institutions".EE BA(Hons) Art & Design Summer 2021*

*"This has been another difficult year for both staff and students so I would like to commend the team for their professionalism. Maintaining lines of communication with students has been challenging this year but judging by the student feedback and marks, staff have managed not only to communicate well with students but also to spark their interest and maintain their engagement. Well done to everyone."* EE BA (Hons) Business (Top Up) and HND Business

*"It is remarkable to see how well the Kingston community and broader partnership has been a source of resilience and strength for students throughout their course. Some of the stories recounted by the students were deeply inspiring and affirmed the high-quality pastoral, professional and academic programme provided at Kingston."* EE FD Early Years suite of programmes 2021

*"It has been a hard year for trainers and trainees, but it has been good to see that the adaptations that all teachers have had to make this year has been brought into projects and professional practices. Strangely, I think it has made for a more creative, interesting, and developmental training experience. Trainees (and the ITT teachers) have developed excellent online pedagogy. Trainees have been presenting their research findings at cross-college conferences and college-wide learning and development sessions".*

EE PCGE/DET Summer 2021

Table 8 – External Examiner Feedback from Creative and Performing Arts, Education and Training and Business subjects

- 2.11 The following external examiner commentary expresses the very strong and personal response to their experience of the work of the Education and Teaching team during the first stage of the Covid pandemic. *"The team have clearly developed an even stronger sense of unity and synergy in their response to the Covid-19 crisis. As an external examiner, I can say with all honesty that I tried to ascertain areas for improvement from all of the collaborative staff and students I spoke with. However, the pride with which both staff and students spoke about the programme was overwhelming and, however tactfully I pitched my request for constructive feedback, the students and staff seemed to be absolutely content with the provision. This is testimony to the hard work, passion and time invested in the provision for both the BA top up and FdA programmes. I have been so impressed by the programme that I have reverted a summary of my findings regarding the impact and civic duty of the partnership back to our own Head of School and Vice Chancellor at the University of Portsmouth"* EE FD Early Years Summer 2020.

2.12 Analysis of External Examiner reports identifies a key strength across the College HE teams of attention to student feedback on their assessments and the benefits that accrue for student learning experience, development, and outcomes. Approximately two thirds of the reports over the TEF assessment period specifically highlight assessment feedback as an area of good practice. The following comments from the reports illustrate this good to excellent practice and again provide evidence from STCG's three biggest subject areas with the largest volume of students, Business, Education and Creative Arts and in this case the long standing and highly successful BA (Hons) Integrative Relational Counselling (which appears under the Applied Health TEF Subject category).

*"The continued focus on formative feedback is excellent practice and has been shown to support students whilst much of the learning was online".* EE FdA/BA(Hons) Education and Learning Summer 2021

*"Feedforward continues to be highly tailored and exemplary throughout the collaborative provisions".*

EE FD Early Years Summer 2021

*"Assessments had to be adapted to cater for the College's closure, it was not feasible to contact me at such short notice. Changes were reviewed in retrospect, the team had produced an effective set of online assessments, at very short notice and should be commended for their approach". EE Foundation Year Business Summer 2020*

*"The staff team go way beyond the call of duty and have a genuine understanding of the pastoral needs of students particularly in light of the current Covid-19 situation. The Interim show was a particular highlight for students this year. The group came together to engage with the task. A transformative experience for all those who took part. The event held the team together through the pandemic. This became obvious during the meeting with the student group" EE Fda Art& Design Summer 2020*

*"Feedback from teacher trainers in both generic & maths pathways is exemplary – very detailed & constructive, with reference to specific examples and clearly signposted areas for development. I also think that students receive useful comments that help them to become aware of their strengths and weaknesses and advice about future work.*

*I consider good practice in the degree to differentiate the feedback offered from the advice given for future work (often referred to as feed-forward)." EE PCGE/DET & BA (Hons) Education*

*"The feedback provided by tutors continues to be balanced and informative, providing students with many suggestions for future pieces and commending the areas of good writing/practice which are clearly well deserved". EE BA (Hons) Integrative Relational Counselling Summer 2022*

Table 9 – External Examiner Feedback from Creative and Performing Arts, Education and Training and Integrative Relational Counselling courses

### **Student Experience – resources, services, people, processes, and policies enhancing the quality of student experience (and outcomes)**

2.13 STCG's clear approach to staff continuing professional development (CPD) designed to enhance learning opportunities and teaching practices along with full/Strategic membership of Advance HE, including input to HE specific focussed staff development events and supporting staff to become fellows and engage with the UK Professional Framework for Higher Education (UKPSFHE) has contributed to enhancement of teaching and assessment practice and the quality of learning experience for all students. The college supports staff to by providing CPD days dedicated to writing submissions for Fellowship. The College currently has 1 Principal Fellow (Head of HE), 3 Senior Fellows, 5 Fellows, 2 Associate Fellows and there are a further 8 working towards Fellowships. The merger has provided this as a new opportunity for lecturing staff at South Thames and Carshalton Colleges. The individual development of lecturers, the encouragement and opportunity for reflection, the cross colleges/group sharing of good practice, and the widened engagement with AdvanceHE is contributing directly to the uplift of teaching and assessment quality and positive engagement with all learners across all HE delivering colleges within the group.

2.14 Face to face teaching is mainly delivered by seminar, and in many practical subjects by workshops. Average group size for academic years 2021/22 and 2020/21 was 10.70 students. The use of the large 'lecture' was discontinued at the College more than 10 years ago as it proved less effective for the lower entry cohorts, those returning to study, and those studying alongside work who benefit much more from greater opportunity for interaction with the lecturer, higher levels of 1-2-1 support, and the ability to work with peers. The College is also mindful that "too small" can be disadvantageous. In cases where class sizes are lower than average effective teaching strategies are adopted including arrangements such as this described below on Fda and BA (Hons) Top Up Art and Design,



and commended by the External Examiner, takes place *“As a specialised art and design course, the cohorts are quite small and to facilitate the peer group learning within this academic year the 2nd and 3rd years are taught together within the same studio. Coupled with a committed course team providing additional online email feedback, this is very supportive for all the students and motivates shared practice and ambition throughout the whole student community”*. The External Examiner for FD Fashion and Textiles 2020/21 recognised the positive impact on students’ experiences, of the levels of support received and also the positive impact on outcomes. *“The small cohort sizes mean that students often receive 1-2-1 academic and technical support, which enables them to fulfil their potential and thrive. The academic environment and community at Kingston College is supportive and nurturing, whilst also being rigorous and maintaining excellent national framework standards. I highly commend the course team and students on this year’s assessment and academic achievements”*.

2.15 The only programmes where ‘lecture’ style remains part of the teaching plan is on Foundation Year Business. A small proportion of teaching and learning is delivered in this way although this is alongside a greater proportion of seminars and workshops. This delivery structure is designed to support transition of the Foundation Year Business to the following 3 years of study at the partner university where ‘lecture’ delivery represents a larger component of teaching.

2.16 The College’s average contact hours (for teaching) per year, for academic years 2021/22 and 2020/21 was 323, (10.09 hours per week over a 32 week academic year). The weekly average contact teaching hours range from approximately 5 hours per week for part time study, to between 12 and 18 hours per week for full- time courses. Each group of students also had on average, over academic years 2021/22 and 2020/21, 26 hours’ worth of tutorial time allocated per year (see 2.18 below).

2.17 University partnered courses operate to a more traditional HE timetable of approx. 26 to 28 weeks per academic year, the majority of the College’s vocational delivery is taught over more weeks, as many as 34/36 in some cases, to provide maximum opportunity for practical, performance and exhibition assessment, particularly valuable to the learners in creative subjects building and assembly portfolios of work. The External Examiner for the very practical subject HNC Construction in Summer 2022 recognised similar benefits for students; *“The students believe the standard of teaching is really good and the teaching staff are knowledgeable in what they are delivering and due to the number of students on the course being low, have been able to steer them through the units”*.

2.18 Personal tutorials and personal tutors are a key part of STCG’s strategic approach to student success. All students are allocated a personal tutor, benefit from regular 1-2-1 tutorials which address academic and other matters and where appropriate will support students to engage with specialist support and advice services provided by the College. Pastoral tutors act as informal components of the Student Voice as well as facilitating representation and encouraging participation in the formal Student Voice function. Personal tutors are also very accessible to students outside of timetabled sessions. The EE for HNC Computing 2022 recognised that *“pastoral support is good, as the Programme Leader closely interacts with students on weekly basis in his role as a course lecturer. Students can express any concerns they may have. Students have many opportunities available to provide feedback on the programme; such as HE Admissions and Induction surveys, HE survey, and Student Staff Consultative Committees”*.

2.19 In addition, on some courses where students are studying alongside work, personal tutors will ensure the allocation of workplace mentors as recognised by the External

Examiner for PGCE/EET Summer 2021 *“Learners receive excellent support from course tutors and mentors, and valuable support in observations. There is very good support in place from mentors in terms of both practicalities and academia.”*

2.20 STCG's acquisition of the University Centre title was recognised in September 2021 by the rebranding and refreshing of the Undergraduate Centre at Kingston College (described in the table below), the main HE college with most students. The Centre provides a bespoke HE learning space with extended opening hours, the opportunity to work both individually and collaboratively and supports the HE ethos and culture for students. The External Examiner for Foundation Year Business in Summer 2021 commented *“Kingston College provides a designated centre for its higher education (HE) provision, this practice has enabled the development of a distinctive HE ethos, benefitting both practitioners and students. Coupled with the involvement of the University and the dedication of the teaching staff this a prime reason why the course has been successful over my tenure”*.

The original design was supported by the commissioning of a 'Learning Space Review' service offered by JISC Regional Support Centre (London) which involved observations, conversations with students and staff. LRC staff visited recently refurbished university libraries/learning spaces to develop an understanding of modern and effective learning space design and furnishings.

HE students can access a dedicated learning space in the University Centre. The study facilities here include computers, Macs, printing, and a range of different study desks offering spaces for individual and group study.

The Centre is split into two main zones. The Individual Study Area is designed to support focussed individual work. It includes computers and 'bring your own device' desks. The Purposeful Group Study Area allows for more collaborative work. It features group study booths and computer desks set up to facilitate small group discussion.

The University Centre Study Hub opening hours, from 8.00am to 9.00pm Monday to Thursday, (including evening opening) recognise the needs and behaviour of HE students. The Centre operates from 8.00am to 5.45pm on Fridays.

The LRC team working with HE student representatives continually explore ways to further develop these services

*Table 10 – South Thames Colleges Group University Centre description*

2.21 HE students also have access to the College's Learning Centre which is brand-new (opened in November 2022) and located in the new college Atrium development (part of a £10 million remodelling) which puts independent learning physically at the heart of the campus. Located on the 1st Floor of the college, the Learning Centre overlooks the college entrance making it one of the first things students and visitors see when they arrive. The Learning Centre is furnished to support a range of study needs and to create a purposeful space for students to carry out research and complete assignments. Almost all the study desk spaces include power for students' own devices. The new Centre offers significantly increased computer access relative to the former Learning Resources Centre. The bookable group study room includes a large display screen which students can use to practice presentations and similar. Learning Centre staff are on hand to support students. This includes helping them to use College systems, developing their digital and study skills in key areas like research and referencing, and helping them to access relevant information resources. A large collection of print resources is physically available in the Centre and staff

promote and support the use of LRC e-books and e-resources. In addition, a Learning Support drop-in service is available in the Learning Centre.

2.22 All students studying on franchised courses in partnership with one of STCG's university partners, and some courses operated under a validated arrangement, will also benefit from physical, and virtual access to a range of learning and other resources/services. STCG is proactive at strategic/partner level to maximise these opportunities for students to allow the enhancement of their learning experience. At course level excellent, effective and close working with university liaison officers, ensure early introduction to these partner services, at induction via visits to the university's campus and/or visits by university staff to STCG, and at key points of study such as in advance of final year dissertations when specific workshops are made available to equip students with the research needs required, and knowledge and understanding of resources available.

2.23 STCG's strategic decision to consolidate courses and learning in the best equipped, staffed and supported locations has ensured that more students in the group have benefitted from the Creative Industries Centre at Kingston College (described in table 11 below) which was recognised by External Examiner FD Fashion & Textiles Summer 2022 *"[student] needs are superbly met and accommodated for by the course team. The college has excellent facilities comparable with any other HE institution, including well equipped digital media suites, sewing workshops, printed textiles workshops and pattern cutting workrooms. Students have ample space to work and are able to use workrooms outside of their timetabled classes"*.

<p>The Creative Industries Centre (at Kingston College) has a wide range of industry standard facilities and equipment that are utilised for the direct benefit of our HE students e.g. BA (hons) Specialist Hair and Media Make up (top-up) have a new dedicated learning space with specialist wig making and drying, and prosthetics facilities that can be accessed both in class and for independent study. The HNC Music students have enjoyed to the state of the art music studios, live, recording and rehearsal rooms as well as a suite of Macs for music composition and creation. Additionally, the BA (Hons) Acting for Stage and Media students, the FdA Media Skills students, and the HNC Performing Arts –Screen Acting and Presenting for TV and Film pathway students have all used the new TV studio and editing facilities. The Penny School gallery has been utilised throughout the period of this TEF submission for a wide range of HE shows, gigs and events for the full gamut of the Centre's HE student population; from comedy nights run by BA (Hons) Acting for Stage and Media students to Music gigs run by HNC Music Production students, to the more traditional Art and Design exhibitions. The College was delighted by the positive feedback received from our University of West London partners during recent course revalidations and annual monitoring meetings held on site.</p>
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*Table 11 – Description of the Kingston College Creative Industries Centre*

2.24 At Kingston College, where all performing arts courses are now offered, following the curriculum review mentioned previously, there is a professional theatre space, and industry standard makeup studios and rehearsal rooms. These provide students with an outstanding learning experience and excellent opportunities to use and experience such facilities as preparation for their progression and future careers. There is also the opportunity of gaining work experience with external users of these spaces.

The ACT Theatre, at Kingston College, is a professionally run venue. It is used for external hire by a wide range of companies and events, as well as being used extensively by HE programmes including Acting, Technical Theatre and Media Makeup. Students can use the theatre in a professional context for their assessments (staging a range of acting and musical performances during their years of study), in addition to working with external companies and festivals who also use these facilities. For several years, BA Acting students have performed their own dissertation plays for FUSE International (Formerly IYAF – International Youth Arts Festival) at the college. Additionally, STCG's HNC Technical Theatre students have the experience of working as backstage crew for a range of theatre productions and music gigs within the college. They also work collaboratively with external companies Eventec and Mayhem Theatre. The newly developed makeup studio at the Creative Industries Centre (Richmond Road Campus) is central to the delivery of the BA in Specialist Hair and Media makeup. These studios are specially fitted to enable the use of latex and prosthetics, materials needed for a higher level of makeup design, application and artistry for theatre, television, and film. Industry workshops by guest professionals have taken place within this new makeup studio, forging links with others in the field. Previous students have been inspired to enter and attend IMATS (International Makeup Artists Trade Show), extending their own and the college's industry connections.

*Table 12 – Description of the ACT Theatre at Kingston College, its uses and benefits for student*

2.25 The purpose built Engineering workshops at Kingston College provide an extensively equipped training centre meeting industry need. It is carefully zoned to allow trainees including HNC/D Engineering students to develop a wide range of skills in electromechanical maintenance and control systems. At South Thames College new workshops and laboratories, built in consultation with the construction industry provide HNC Construction students with an up to date working environment providing excellent experience of the industry.

2.26 Following merger all colleges moved to the Moodle (Open LMS) virtual learning environment and students and staff benefitted from a more consistent and reliable level of service and the opportunity to share good practice in its use and benefit from centrally based support and training. This platform is used extensively by lecturers and students not only as a repository of materials but also as an interactive tool including the use of a wide range of formative and summative assessment technology, as well as online assignment submission, feedback and grading. Curriculum staff set up online assignment submissions to utilise Turnitin Feedback Studio services (including the plagiarism detection service) which are integrated with the college's Moodle platform. Moodle courses are automatically provided at course level; in addition, curriculum areas set up Moodle provision for their students at the module/unit level. In addition to Moodle, Microsoft Teams is fully supported with class teams provided for all courses, widely utilised with students as an online communication, teaching and collaboration platform.

All students have a Microsoft Office 365 account which provides access to the full Office suite of applications. This account is available within 24 hours of full enrolment on a course and students are strongly supported to start using their college applications and access their college platforms from that stage in their student journey – support materials are provided remotely via a Welcome Portal and a comprehensive online induction course. Students can request individual support via the 'AskLRC' service, both on-site and remotely. Digital learning resources are provided to students, including an Online Library of over 1,500 e-books, plus databases of full-text journal articles (provided via Wiley, JSTOR and EBSCO platforms). Use of these resources and academic sources by students is supported by 'Starting Research' online induction courses aimed at HE students and through the provision of bookable face to face induction sessions delivered by LRC staff.

Provider name: South Thames Colleges Group (STCG)

UKPRN: 10003674

Pro-Monitor, the on-line integrated student monitoring, support and communication system is the College's key embedded and impactful tool to support target setting and monitoring of achievement, and is extensively used by teacher, support staff and students to keep track of their progress and communicate. The personal development planning (PDP) function of Pro-monitor provides vital support in student objective setting, together with reflection on studies and progress. Pro-monitor also acts, via the gradebook function, as a means for students to monitor performance.

These online tools were in place prior to the Covid pandemic, are referred to as part of the college's effective response to the pandemic and were further and quickly developed during that time of crisis.

2.27 Whilst the utilisation of attendance monitors, who contact students, and liaise between students and tutors about absence from timetabled study, may seem an unusual intervention strategy in the HE context, its focus is supportive and is well received by students. Attendance monitors support for younger students just starting their study and transitioning from school, or FE College, is familiar and provides an encouraging additional motivation to engage with their new study environment whilst providing opportunities to ask about other support services and more quickly gain any support they need. For more mature students, studying part time or alongside work, the contact is positively regarded and often assists them in engaging with the academic and wider support services that are more difficult to identify for those attending for less time at college and outside the core daytime hours. Attendance monitoring is an important operational and quality oversight function and is included with the College's Quality data dashboard reviewed at the oversight meetings mentioned in subsection 1.22.

2.28 Section 1.11 explained STCG's Scholarship and Research Strategy and memberships of collaborative groups which have provided opportunities to research, develop and share good teaching, learning and student engagement practice for the benefit for STCG's HE students' learning experience and outcome. An example of this was the successful application for funding to MEG to support a research exercise entitled "Defining the HE identity within a FE environment" which explored the expectations of HE students in a FE College environment (and specifically explored the feelings, wants and needs of the performing art cohort referred to in subsection 2.3 who had expressed such low levels of satisfaction. This has positively informed STCG's approach to the development of the HE ethos within the College. This research and resulting activity have been presented and shared with other parts of the sector including, the members of MEG and Linking London HE in FE Practitioner Group. Similarly, a research exercise undertaken by STCG's Head of HE entitled "The attributes of [TEF] Gold Colleges" has informed STCG's HE strategy and been shared with the sector via Linking London HE in FE Practitioner Group.

### **3. Student Outcomes**

#### **TEF indicators – Continuation, Completion and Progression**

3.1 TEF indicators for continuation show a "materially below" benchmark performance for full time students but a "materially [and significantly] above" benchmark performance for part time students. The distribution of materially above continuation rates for part time students suggests compelling evidence of outstanding outcomes for that group of students. Table 13 below combines the full and part time continuation rates which, on a weighted average basis, shows for the total population of students a "broadly in line" with benchmark situation for continuation.

Continuation	Denominator	Indicator %	Benchmark %	Variation pp
Full time	2510	78.9	84	-5.1
Part time	810	84.2	76.1	+8.1
Overall	3320	80.2	82.1	-1.9

*Table 13 – TEF Part and Full Time Student Indicators for Continuation at STCG*

- 3.2 Whilst part time continuation rates have been strong and “materially [and significantly] above benchmark” through the four years of the TEF assessment period, the full time rates have been less good. However, the trend in full time continuation rates is improving (see table 14 below), the gap between actual and benchmark has almost halved over this period. Whilst further improvement is required this does demonstrate the positive impact that merger, strategic decisions such as the curriculum review, and the sharing of good practice between the previously separate colleges has had in supporting students to continue study.
- 3.3 Year 1 completion indicators, in table 14 below, were specifically impacted by STCG’s inheritance from a pre-merger college of a sub contractual arrangement with a private London college which included a cohort of 194 full time students who started their study in the academic year 2016/17, the year before the Group was formed. This continuation rate for this group was extremely disappointing (45%), far below benchmark and well below STCG’s core college continuation rates. Subsection 1.15 explained STCG’s immediate decision to discontinue this arrangement and supporting activity. If these student enrolments were not considered part of STCG as it has operated since merger in 2017 and were removed from the TEF metrics for STCG the continuation rate for year 1 would improve to 83.65% (broadly in line with benchmark - 83.1%) and over the whole four year TEF assessment period to 81.73% (broadly in line with benchmark – 84%).

Year	Full time Continuation %	Benchmark %	Part time continuation %	Benchmark %
1	75.4	83.1	89.8	78.7
2	78.8	83.7	74.4	71.1
3	83.6	83.4	90.0	80.4
4	81.9	85.0	89.8	80.4

*Table 14 – Time series of TEF Student Indicators for Continuation at STCG*

- 3.4 TEF indicators for completion show a “materially below” benchmark performance for full time students but a “materially [and significantly] above” benchmark performance for part time students. The table below combines the full and part time completion rates which, which on a weighted average basis, shows for the total population of students a still “materially below” benchmark situation for completion but one that is only 0.3 percentage points from a “broadly in line” performance and less statistically reliable.
- 3.5 Subsection 3.3 above explained the negative impact of an inherited cohort of students studying under a contractual arrangement agreed prior to the formation of STCG on continuation rates. There has been a similar impact upon completion rates. Despite being given an extended period to complete study and assessment this cohort ultimately achieved a completion rate of just 26.29% far below benchmark and well below STCG’s core college continuation rates. If same principle was applied to completion rates and these student enrolments were not considered part of STCG as it has operated since merger in 2017 and were removed from the TEF metrics for STCG the completion over the whole four

year TEF assessment period would improve to 79.59% (almost exactly matching the benchmark and considered as “broadly in line with benchmark” – 79.8%).

Completion	Denominator	Indicator %	Benchmark %	Variation %
<b>Full time</b>	3330	76.5	79.8	-3.4
<b>Part time</b>	1420	84.4	75.4	+9.0
<b>Overall</b>	4750	78.9	77.1	-1.8

*Table 15 – TEF Student Indicators for Completion at STCG*

3.6 TEF indicators for progression show a “broadly in line” with benchmark performance for both full time students and part time students. Table 16 below combines the full and part time progression rates which, on a weighted average basis, shows for the total population of students a “broadly in line” with benchmark situation for progression.

Progression	Denominator	Indicator %	Benchmark %	Variation %
<b>Full time</b>	480	59.9	62	-2.1
<b>Part time</b>	110	73.5	75.9	-2.4
<b>Overall</b>	590	62.4	64.6	-2.2

*Table 16 – TEF Student Indicators for Continuation (part and full time) at STCG*

3.7 The trend in both full and part time progression rates is improving (table 17 below), full time by 7.3 percentage points, part time by 13.5 percentage points and in the most recent year with data available is “materially above benchmark” for both modes of delivery. This significant improvement again demonstrates the positive impact of the merger of the previously separate colleges.

Year	Full time Progression %	Benchmark %	Part time Progression %	Benchmark %
<b>1</b>	59.8	60.6	71.0	77.0
<b>2</b>	54.5	61.2	57.5	74.7
<b>3</b>	67.1	64.6	84.5	75.9
<b>4</b>	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available

*Table 17 – Time series of TEF Student Indicators for Progression at STCG*

3.8 The following sections of this Student Outcomes section will explore, explain, and provide evidence of educational gain, student development during study, their preparedness for employment and/or further study and the how STCG activities and support enhance this.

3.9 EE reports identify educational gain and how well prepared students are for the range of work and study to be faced in the future. Many of the extracts from EE reports below cover the Creative and Performing Arts, one of the biggest subject areas in STCG, and from which students progress into a range of routes including self-employment, portfolio careers, employment that is non continuous but developmental, project/community based activity.

*“The course allows students to meet and surpass national thresholds through offering a variety of challenges. This is probably the case more in the last two years as students have had to adapt to the changes that Covid has demanded. In many ways this has brought out the best aspects of this course in that it seeks to create students who are skilled and able to function in a variety of media and a variety of contexts, to create their*



*own work and to act as creative producers of their own work". EE BA(Hons) Acting for Stage and Media Summer 2021*

*"The course leader continues to work on ideas for furthering industry links with a view to establishing live briefs and more 'real life' assignment scenarios, which is a very positive move and will benefit students". EE FD Fashion & Textiles Summer 2021*

*"The nature of the course delivered across a broad range of art and design disciplines that allow students to self-diagnose their strengths as they progress is an excellent model." EE FD & BA (Hons) Art & Design Summer 2021*

*"Innovative approaches to learning and teaching and support for autonomous learning are seen through initiatives such as Artist Residency for alumni and the inclusion of a micro-teach activity as part of DS6003 which is one of a number of opportunities to develop rich, transferable skills, utilised within and beyond the programme. Students are incredibly positive about their experiences here and they are aspirational activities for the FdA students. Clear evidence of 'distance travelled' in the work submitted for assessment, as the result of programme structure, formative and summative feedback and student reflection." EE FD & BA (Hons) Art & Design Summer 2022*

*"Most students produce work above national threshold standards which is a testimony to the delivery of the training and teaching. Students emerge from the course 'industry ready' which is evidenced by the number of students who are taken on by agents on leaving the course" EE BA (Hons) Acting for Stage and Media Summer 2020.*

Table 18 – EE Commentary – Acting for Stage and Media and Art and Design

- 3.10 The EE comments below (table 19), from a range of creative and performing arts courses across the college, further highlight how STCG has developed relevant educational gain and supported the development of the artistic and creative talents of its students, their personal growth, ability to solve problems and prepared them for a variety of work and career routes, often outside those that had been envisaged when joining the course.

*"There is a clear sense that students are well supported, in what can be a challenging environment for UG study, with small cohorts in a largely FE institution. The students I met were engaged, celebrated their time at the College and were able to articulate well their professional, artistic and personal growth; feeling prepared to graduate. this is a testament to the programme team, structure and support systems in place." EE FD & BA (Hons) Art & Design Summer 2022*

*"A sufficient amount of work was produced by students showing strong technical ability and industry knowledge. Students are taught in small cohorts and have excellent access to staff. The centre is delivering scenario based assignment briefs. Informed decision making helps to inform creative ideas. Students are encouraged to experiment with techniques to problem solve results. Students often meet the distinction criteria. Final exhibitions demonstrate experimental outcomes that are often sophisticated and commercially viable." EE HNC Art and Design (Graphic and Photography) Summer 2022*

*"The combination of challenging assessment tasks that fuse live performance outcomes and media allows the students to think beyond the actor/agent module (though that is still a potential outcome for them), and to consider themselves creators of their own work. They can leave the course with the ability to work in fringe/community/online arenas and to create work which requires performance skills but is also critically and conceptually solid."* EE BA (Hons) Acting for Stage and Media

Table 19 – EE Commentary – Acting for Stage and Media, Art & Graphic Design

3.11 As explained in section 2 STCG's facilities for Art, Design, Creative Industries, Engineering and Construction provide a significant proportion of STCG's HE students with a high quality vocational experience, exposure to and use of industry standard equipment. Opportunities to experience real work situations are fully exploited. Students on course such as Acting, Theatre Technicians and Make up For Film and Stage work collaboratively to stage live dramatic and musical performances, as well as the chance to work with external production companies hiring spaces. Art and Design and Fashion and Textile students fully utilise the studio and gallery spaces for mid and end of year Exhibitions and Shows, exhibiting not only to fellow students, friends, and family but also local artists, businesses, and fashion designers, including national brands. The EE for HNC Art and Design (Graphic and Photography) reported in Summer 2022 – *"Final exhibitions demonstrate experimental outcomes that are often sophisticated and commercially viable"* and represent educational gain of direct relevance to future careers.

3.12 A significant proportion of the awards at STCG support progression to further study at either HND, or Full Honours Degree level. The strength and longevity of STCG's university partnerships supports this progression and provides clear and well supported pathways. Some pathways take successful Diplomats to the partner university for their Top Up study, and some continue to study STCG on Top Up provision validated by partners. Examples of very positive progression are the suite of Foundation Degrees Fdas in Early Years Education (operating for 20 years) from which students progress to the partner university for Top Up study, Business (operating for 15 years) and at Carshalton College where the partner university has validated a Top Up degree offered at the College. Significant numbers of Diplomats have progressed internally or to the university partner to complete Top Ups. All set for some against modest past academic achievement, a sizeable time gap since study and alongside the challenges of work and family life, representing educational gain of a broader nature than just subject based knowledge and skill.

## 4. References

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