

**Provider name:** Bedford College  
**UKPRN:** 10000610

**The Bedford College Group**  
**Teaching Excellence Framework Submission 2023**  
***Introduction from the College Group***



**We place the student at the heart of everything we do at the College.**

We provide students with the right tools to be the best in their industries and equipped to compete in a competitive job market. Our students are distinct, and many are from widening participation backgrounds, the first in the family to study higher education and are disadvantaged. Our strategy helps us increase their prospects for employment, with many students winning national competitions as part of their studies leading to employment or further study.

This submission provides the panel with examples demonstrating our values and commitment to students by providing them with an outstanding experience and excellent outcomes. Our students come from diverse dimensions of distinctiveness that enhance the experience for all students. We are proud that our student body comprises a large proportion of mature students managing complex home lives. It is even more important that we understand their individual and collective needs. Our curriculum design strategy ensures that we equip our colleagues with skills to support students on their journey by understanding their needs.

The submission demonstrates our high-quality teaching and student impact strategies that change students' lives through social mobility. We include a breadth of evidence in the submission, ranging from student comments, internal survey results, focus groups and employer feedback, to our TEF metrics. It is important to note that we have included the voice of all of our Higher Education students through the use of our internal survey results rather than focusing on NSS data. We feel this demonstrates our high-quality teaching and learning and shows that we place the student voice at the heart of our College and this submission. We hope you agree that it highlights the impacts of our high-quality teaching dimensions and the positive impact that our students have on our local community.

Lead Higher Education Student  
Representative, Teaching Excellence  
Framework Student Team

Vice Principal, Chair of The Bedford  
College Group, Teaching Excellence  
Framework Team.

## **Section 1: Provider Context**

### **1.1 About Us**

The Bedford College Group is a large general further education college based in Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire. The College has campuses in Bedford, Corby, Kettering and Wellingborough, along with Shuttleworth, our specialist land-based College in Central Bedfordshire, where we deliver our Agriculture and Animal Science provision. The College Group serves over 12,000 students annually across the counties and provides further, adult and higher education, including 75 higher education programmes across our communities in Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire. Our programmes are validated by the University of Bedfordshire, the University of Northampton and the University of Huddersfield. The College also runs Higher Nationals, validated by Pearson, focusing on technical higher education in specialist areas such as engineering. The College has strong links and relationships with local employers and is actively involved with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), and South-East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP). The College is a founding member of the Research Colleges Group, which focuses on developing pedagogy and research in colleges and supports the College's research-informed policy design, which ensures that we develop approaches which drive high-quality teaching, learning and assessment whilst also promoting research in the HE in FE sector.

### **1.2 Our Bedford Community**

Bedford is a large mixed-market county with a population of 117,400 aged between 16 and 64. Bedford has a strong heritage of expertise, having been an agricultural town, however employment is now predominately service industry based along with a with a strong cultural arts scene. Bedford itself has a higher population of females (59,400) than males, which is reflected in our student population. The area is also above the national average for levels of economic inactivity (25.6%) and has high levels of deprivation. The most recent ONS census results indicated that 48.4% of households in Bedford were deprived, from which our Cauldwell town campus attracts many of its students. The local area supports 90,000 employment opportunities (ONS Job Density, 2020), particularly in professional occupations (23,300) and care, leisure and other service occupations (13,300). Bedford has 7,465 businesses operating within it, with industries focused on manufacturing, retail, human and social work activities (ONS, Employee Jobs, 2021)

### **1.3 Our Northamptonshire Community**

Northamptonshire is also a large market town county with a population of 224,400 people. A strong manufacturing and production heritage drive the local economy. Northamptonshire also has a higher number of females, 113,300, and this is again reflected in our student population. The area has below-average levels of economic activity and has higher levels of deprivation (60%) than the national average. It also supports a below-average (27,700) number of positions in professional occupations, but larger numbers of jobs in manual employment such as plant and machine operatives (38,400).

### **1.4 College Mission**

The College's mission is to support the local and national economy through the promotion, development and delivery of excellent skills, training and education. As such, the College promotes itself as a genuine alternative to university through its Higher Education programmes and seeks to promote social inclusion and personal advancement in the local communities. In collaboration with our partners, we drive local social mobility in areas of deprivation across Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire through unique Foundation Degrees, Higher Technical

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Qualifications and Higher Nationals that support our skilled and vibrant industries, that are the beating heart of the local community. Our strategy is to increase participation locally within both counties, as both have populations with levels of higher education qualifications below the national average. We have developed our offer to drive up participation in the higher technical qualifications needed in both counties.

To achieve this mission, the College actively seeks to recruit students from underrepresented groups, particularly focusing on mature students, carers, disabled students, ethnic minorities and people from backgrounds that traditionally do not engage in Higher Education. The success of this is borne out in the fact that the College has an above average number of students from these backgrounds. It is committed through its mission and values to continue to build on Access to Higher Education programmes for these students. This includes the development of new courses and delivery modes which meet the needs of the broad range of students the College serves.

### 1.5 Our Aim and Values

**“Delivering world-class skills and vocational education to the communities we serve.”**

Bedford College aims to be one of the best general further education colleges in the country, offering courses at all levels, from entry-level to higher education. In particular, we wish to be recognised as:

The leading advocate for learning within the local community with strong and productive links with other partners

1. A nationally recognised centre of excellence in arts and technology education
2. The leading provider of care, leisure and business training in the county
3. The best local sixth form measured by results and value-added scores
4. A leading and innovative provider of work-based and community-based learning
5. A provider of expert and individual guidance, advice and other student support services, including first-class learning environments
6. A first-choice employer, being well-managed and financially robust.

Our HE provision is a key facet of our offer, ensuring we provide the pathways and progression to support the careers and aspirations of our local communities.

**We put the learner at the heart of all we do.**



### **1.6 Our students**

The College's student population is diverse, with students coming from all corners of our diverse communities. The College has a slightly larger population of females studying, matching the local labour market information. We do have areas in our provision where there has traditionally been a gender imbalance, such as male-dominated fields of construction and engineering and female-dominated education. The college is actively seeking to address these imbalances. We are proud to have engaged in a national campaign to promote teaching in Further Education that challenged these stereotypes to promote careers open to all. We have also recently instigated a campaign to encourage women into construction and engineering with a series of activities and inspirational visiting speakers. The Colleges' predominant study programme length is single-year courses (60.6%). The College tends to recruit students who have lower than average UCAS points or have professional equivalent experience before joining us. Many of our students use our qualifications as stepping stones in their career journeys, often taking breaks due to employment progression and fitting in education to develop their careers whilst also working. Our students' main areas of study are Agriculture and Animal Sciences (17.2%), Creative Arts (19.9%), Performing Arts (15.3%) and Engineering (8.5%), with the majority of students aged below 21 (63.3%). We are, however, experiencing and supporting growth in our cohorts of students over 21 (46.6%). The College is proud to work with significant numbers of students from IMD Q1/Q2 (26.4%), particularly from our Northamptonshire campuses, which is a pleasing outcome of our work advocating higher education study in traditionally hard-to-reach communities, which was driven by strategies in our Access and Participation plan. When disaggregated by disability type, Bedford College has a higher proportion of students with cognitive and learning difficulties and social or communication impairment on our full-time courses than the national average. We are proud of our work in ensuring positive outcomes for these students, with our supportive wrap-around services ensuring that these students reach their potential.

Many of our students from these communities' experience additional barriers to accessing, completing and excelling in their studies, with challenges such as childcare responsibilities or being care experienced. Adapting our curriculum and ensuring support is on hand from our academic and student services teams and bursaries enables learners to achieve their potential and our teams to further tailor their approach and support. We place a great deal of emphasis on truly knowing each of our students, their background, and career aspirations. We monitor students closely through tutorials and data reporting to ensure they progress towards their goals, with smaller group sizes and tutorial support being key factors in this success. Our

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student support services utilise their experience and expertise gained through supporting many of our students through their further education journey before progressing to our university centre courses. Growing each year, students decide to stay because they value the support, we offer them. They offer a full range of counselling and support services through 'Yourspace', including committing to offering mental health first aid training to all staff to ensure our services are impactful. This wrap-around tailored support provides the students with opportunities to seek further support to address issues that may affect their studies, and we feel it contributes significantly to the maintenance of our strong continuation rates 84.7(TEF Metric Overall Indicator -Time Series), particularly for those from a widening participation background.

YOURSACE ONLINE  
STUDENT SERVICES WEBSITE

Academic help Careers Financial Key contacts Get involved FAQs Contact

Our college mission is the driving force behind our targets of engaging and facilitating the success of students from backgrounds who may not traditionally see university-level study is for them. We understand the complexities of the journey from level 3 to HE and the challenges facing those wishing to return to education to change careers or upskill within their current employment. Our strategy is to intentionally promote and engender aspirations for university-level study through our Flying Higher programme within our own FE provision which has led to strong and improving progression to HE along with the associated outcomes of improved employment opportunities after their studies. Transition bridging programmes operated by our curriculum teams for progressing and external students ensure they approach their new courses with greater confidence, having started to develop the skills needed to succeed in higher education. The programme focuses on enhancing student aspirations through career planning and advice and developing study skills before joining their course, informing our HE team's understanding of students' prior attainment and the tailored support they might need while they study. , a student on our in Outdoor

Adventure, is an example of a student who achieved with the support of the programmes above: "I initially studied my level 2 in outdoor adventure in . I enjoyed the challenge and appreciated the support from the staff. I was encouraged to complete my level 3, following which I worked in the outdoor sector, instructing at . years on and I finally decided to study my in outdoor adventure

. The supportive environment was instrumental in my choice to move on to HE, with the staff building my confidence and my range of academic skills as the course progresses. I would never have imagined I might get to this level, but with the support and encouragement of the staff team, I am now, , determined to complete my and look to apply for a management role as my next steps"

### **1.7 HE Vision and Mission**

Our Higher Education mission focuses on providing students with exceptionally high-quality teaching and learning that exposes students to opportunities to take ownership of their learning. We aim to ensure that students have access to their specialist subject locally and that they can progress into further study or employment. Often our students come from areas of deprivation (27% TEF Metrics – Deprivation Quintiles), and our mission is to improve student outcomes through a curriculum tailored towards the diverse range of communities and industries we support across Bedfordshire's and Northamptonshire's key areas of deprivation. Our focus for teaching and learning is to provide students with personalised, tailored learning that enables each student to achieve their potential. Our curriculum teams are experienced at supporting cohorts with low prior attainment and educational confidence. A project introduced in 2020 of risk rating and then supporting students throughout their studies has proved useful in identifying and targeting students for additional support, and the intention during 2022 is to broaden this to measure and support the setting of aspirational grades to promote further improvement in value added scores and higher degree classification outcomes.

The Higher Education Strategy has been designed to underpin the TBCG strategic aims (in bold) by the following:

Our strategic themes for Higher Education

#### **Intent 1 – Expanded Opportunity**

To grow and develop our higher education provision by 10% to promote **Educational Sustainability**.

#### **Intent 2 – Enhanced Partnership**

To develop relationships with new HEIs to build a **High-Quality Provision** across The Bedford College Group.

#### **Intent 3 – Outstanding Student Outcomes**

To continue to develop and improve student outcomes by supplying a **High-Quality Provision** across The Bedford College Group.

#### **Intent 4 – High Quality enriched Student Experience**

To enhance and build a Higher Education student experience that builds a **strong HE ethos** across the College.

#### **Intent 5 – Sector Leading**

To continue and develop strength as a leader in National HE Policy within the FEHE sector. Our Higher Education strategy has been enriched with research-informed policy focusing on the following areas to enhance our high-quality teaching.

- Our relationships that **tutors have with parents** are the key influence in deciding to study HE , and it is important that we tailor our student experience to meet those first in the family studying higher education or from a widening participation background.

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- Students need a **broader curriculum** that focuses on employability and drives skill development ready for the workplace, such as Higher Technical Qualifications.
- That we maximise the potential **career opportunities** available to students post qualification by driving high-quality teaching experience that focuses on broader skill development through trips and industry experts.
- To enhance **teaching quality** and **study environments** through capital investment projects and staff development.
- That we support students: With detailed **feedback and support** on assignments and provide more one-to-one time with tutors to enhance their outcomes and improve the student experience.

We believe that one of our key strengths is the close ties forged between the college and its local and regional employers. The College engages with a network of over 800 employers across our local communities and regional patch. These employers operate in many industries, including Agriculture, Design, Engineering, and Manufacturing. The embedding of work-based learning and the development of employability skills is directly linked to our student's success in gaining vocationally relevant and engaging employment after completing their studies with us. It also informs and enriches their study, with employer contributions to the designing of the curriculum and assessment. We work with employers to provide students with life-changing experiences through developing work-based learning but also competitions and assessments based on real-world examples and case studies that generate genuine employment-related skills and experiences. We can support these particular students to achieve successful outcomes that result in employability, winning competitions and progressing to higher levels of study.

"We encourage all of our art students to enter national and international competitions, and it's always rewarding when their creativity is recognised with D&AD, Young Creative Network Awards and the Creative Conscience Awards, winning against fierce competition from other universities. Over the years our art students have won approximately 37 international competitions and the results are proudly displayed at the back of our studio. Winning competitions gives our students immense confidence in their abilities and is a fantastic thing to mention on CV's"

The curriculum offer is tailored from our Access to HE provision, which leads to strong progression into specialist areas such as Agriculture, Animal Sciences, Education and Social Sciences. As indicated in our provider metrics, the College has many mature students who are often in employment upskilling to degree level (23.6%). Our offer includes several Access to Higher Education programmes, designed for those who may not have been able to

successfully engage in or remain in higher education. For example, many of our students are mature with families and often disadvantaged (TEF Metric Q1/Q2 26.4%). The College provides full, part-time and flexible courses to ensure that we can improve social mobility within higher education, particularly because a significant number of students are from a widening participation background. The OfS Data set demonstrates our impact locally over recent years to improve local participation by increasing our curriculum offer focused on our local community needs. Our curriculum pedagogy is focused on our strong relationships with employers and enriched curricula that drive employability skills and competition (TEF Metric Q1/Q2 26.4%). Our curriculum is driven by local community needs connected by businesses and employers, who shape our courses to ensure strong employment opportunities. By having this at the core of our HE mission, we have built strong relationships with employers and engage with over a thousand employers across the region to shape our provision and maximise student outcomes. This has led to some fantastic results, for example, in the Arts courses, completion rates are 89.3% and Engineering 87.9 % (TEF Metrics, Completion). These are particular areas where our HE Mission has been successful.

## **Section 2**

### **2.1 Student Experience**

The College has a longstanding excellent reputation as a provider of higher education that provides high-quality student experience that improves outcomes for local communities and drives local economic development. The College's most recent OFSTED visit graded the College as 'Good' across the board, maintaining our strong history of inspection outcomes being rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' over the last twenty years. The most recent inspection noted our comprehensive curriculum and progression routes into Higher Education. The Inspection Team commented on how our curriculum allows for students to progress from vocational courses to our higher-level provision and the breadth of the offer in specialist areas. In particular, our specialism at Shuttleworth gives students from disadvantaged areas access to higher education in their specialist field. In our own student feedback survey data from 2020, 90% agree 'I am satisfied with the quality of my course'.

The College has a strategic focus on employability which is highlighted in the College Strategy for Working with Employers. Our most recent QAA review made the judgement that our higher education provision has an approach that is strategic and market-led, and responsive to the local community. It states that our provision meets the needs of local businesses and student demand. For example, this can be seen with our expansion of curriculum offer into Higher Technical Qualifications in Computing. The review also highlights the impact that our curriculum has as it provides a wide range of opportunities for learners to work with local employers and how this opportunity positively impacts the student experience and their outcomes. We have developed strong partnerships with local employers, allowing us to embed employability skills and opportunities across our provision. Two years ago we were invited to name a new £7m brewery to be developed by a local brewery in Bedford which we named Brewpoint. Our students designed the branding for the development including all internal signage and beer names and labels. The identity developed and the beer can labels won international awards in America within a recognised awards platform for the brewing industry.





Through our curriculum planning process, we draw extensively on the expertise of subject experts that work within the industry to develop curricula. This ensures that students are exposed to real-world examples and understand the relevance of theoretical and practical learning to enhance both their assessments but also their ability to move into employment. For example, student comments consistently demonstrate the following, Student A – Fashion – *“We’re working on scenarios that focus on industry based standards. We use materials and machines that are industry quality, so staff set us the challenge of making garments at a professional standard. Having worked in the industry, staff guide us to the level that is expected, and we get to visit factories and visit the V&A to help us to create our best garments and build our portfolio to gain work in the future.”*

## 2.2 Educational gain

The College’s mission is to provide world-class skills and vocational excellence to the curriculum to benefit our students, employers and the local community. Often our students have challenging backgrounds that make it difficult for them to progress in their studies and in society. Students that come to College with poor prior attainment from schools are identified and supported in their journey through further and into higher education, promoting social mobility. Our mission to help realise these gains is through understanding the student’s journey and **adding value through opportunity**. We recognise that all of our students have different starting points and that each student is an individual. When students decide to join us, we undertake a robust interview, and as their course progresses our tutorial support includes career planning, advice and guidance for tutors experienced in their field. This allows the tutors to tailor the teaching experience for cohorts of students to promote continuation and positive outcomes such as employability. Understanding the individual and their journey is key to our success. Our recent internal survey results have continued to increase, and students have responded positively in recent surveys where 85% of students indicated that the course had exposed them to new opportunities. These internal surveys outperform those from the NSS, which only canvas small numbers of students our partnership programmes rather than our provision as a whole.

## 2.3 Industry Professionals

Our curriculum is embedded with opportunities with **industry professionals**. We know that these opportunities provide students with confidence to progress into the workplace and provide them with unique opportunities to be successful through networking. Many have led to student placements for work experience or employment, giving them a unique advantage to compete for jobs in competitive fields such as the Creative Arts. For example, our BAFTA workshops for creative arts students included workshops on script writing from a BAFTA winning writer. Our internal survey results indicated that 86% positively agreed that their courses helped them develop through these experiences. , Media Student, commented on this experience by saying, "Having as a guest speaker gave us the opportunity to gain insight from an award-winning scriptwriter in our classroom. We found this motivational as he explained his career journey; it opened our eyes to the opportunity available in our industry at the time, particularly with COVID and the impact it had on our industry. I used his advice to help with future assignments" Students could then access the College's Careers Service to help build their career plans. The College's Careers Advice service is award-winning and holds Matrix accreditation for its outstanding advice to students.

## **2.4 Student Support Services**

As part of our **wrap-around services** at the College, students are provided enhanced study skills support to help them develop their skills with academic coaching to ensure successful graduate outcomes. These workshops range from Academic Skills to 1-1 tuition. Our students find these extra sessions useful, as indicated in our internal survey results, where students discussed that they have impacted and enhanced their experience. For example, student comments consistently demonstrate the following Student A – Education – *"The 1:1 support is having a real impact on my experience. I had concerns about the volume of work, but it has helped me to believe I can complete the course."* and Student B *"The HNC graphic design tutors have emphasised a lot how the skills we are developing in the course directly relate to working in the industry. From what I've heard and seen in the department, many former graphics students at Bedford have found good jobs in the industry. So, I've felt excited and reassured that the course has demonstrable links to employment and industry connections."* Student C – *"Having not done much academic work since A levels, the first piece of work we did made me feel more confident. I was concerned about referencing and the academic challenge, but I enjoyed the content and how it related to my knowledge and research means I am now more confident and that completing a degree is achievable"*. These sessions have noticeably increased our internal survey scores, where 84% of students feel the course has helped them to develop their confidence. The programme was implemented after 2016 student feedback indicated a need for a targeted, cross college approach. From our recent internal survey, 86% of students positively responded that the college values the views and opinions of students.

## 2.5 World-class teaching experts

As part of our ethos of excellence, we are proud to expose students to **world-class experts** in their discipline to help ensure they have the knowledge, skills and confidence to react to a competitive job market. This includes students receiving a more comprehensive teaching experience that is engrained in expert pedagogy and expert skill. The College has a strong history of staff winning national recognition for developing curricula or in recognition of their outstanding teaching, leading to National Teaching Awards. In 2022, [redacted] won the Pearson National Teaching Award for their innovative impact on the student experience at the College and for sharing impactful, high-quality teaching across the College. This follows TES awards for teachers and assessors of the year for our staff in 2017, 2018 and 2020. In our student survey data from 2020, 93% of students agree or strongly agree that staff are good at explaining things and making their subject interesting.

## 2.6 Network embedded curriculum

Our Courses are embedded with **key sector and employer competitions** that enhance the curriculum. These opportunities give all the students a chance to enter and develop a brief competition submission with their assessment. Competitions allow students to develop their skills to industry standards and provide excellent evidence of their learning for future employment. Our students actively compete in World Skills Competitions across the sector. This provides the students with further opportunities to develop **networking skills** and to be headhunted by national, regional and local employers. Student entries have often won awards for their submission, with students receiving gold, silver and bronze awards across the College. From our internal survey, 90% of students positively commented that placements and competitions had a positive impact on their experience and helped them develop their skills. In addition, 92% of students feel their programme is intellectually stimulating and challenges them to achieve their best work. Internal survey results of 183 students show 85% feel units they study positively impact their learning. For example, student comments consistently demonstrate the following Student B – Graphic Design – “I feel my course does a good job of

showing how exciting the topic is. The tutors are passionate in how they talk about design, and they have a wealth of real world experience in the field which makes it feel very practical and real, not just theory. I have felt inspired to explore graphic design more, beyond the basics of the course due to discussions in the sessions.” Student C – TeacherEd- “Our tutor has expressed how important it is to fully immerse ourselves in our departments, and attend as many sessions and events/conferences as possible. We are better able to sell ourselves, and more likely to be employed at the end of the course. I get treated as a teacher, not just as a student. “

## **2.7 Networking and Career-Focused Curriculum**

As part of their college experience, students are exposed to **networking and career-focused events and fairs**. These opportunities with employers support our curriculum ethos and are driven by employers with their skill needs. This has led to stronger outcomes for students as they begin to build their networks early in their higher education journey. In our own student feedback survey data in 2022, 83% of students positively responded that their course had provided them with good career advice and that they felt ready for the workplace. These events give students access to local, regional and national employers. They provide students with access to employment disciplines that are often smaller in size but greater in national, regional and local importance, such as Agriculture and Teacher Education. This exposes them to opportunities within their chosen sector, maximising their employment opportunities both now and into the future. Student comments consistently demonstrate that they believe their higher education course has helped them with employability skills for their sector (Internal Survey Results 84%). Feedback collated from local employers often indicates this as a strength and maintains connections they value. These are examples of the broader benefits that having industry professionals who are also highly skilled teachers and educators can bring to the student experience. “Shuttleworth is a great place to study if you want a career in Agriculture. The staff have great contacts for work placements and future jobs and will help you every step of the way” Foundation Degree Agriculture student. In addition, other students commented, TeacherEd - “I like the fact that our tutor uses lots of different methods and resources, showcasing them and demonstrating how they can be used and applied in our own practice.” Student B – TeacherEd – “My placement line manager has already talked to me about undertaking internal verification IQA courses and assessor courses, with the expectation, but also support, that I progress further in my career.” Student C – “We have been given the opportunity to complete a dodgeball qualification funded by the college and have been encouraged to enrol in the fitness instructor qualification the college runs at a reduced cost. They also ask us what qualifications we would like them to look into

so they can arrange some of them and help guide us to courses they think we should be doing based on our career goals.”

## **2.8 Curriculum Enhancement - Trips and Visits**

Our Courses are enriched with a range of **trips and visits** that provide opportunities that promote high-quality teaching, learning and assessment that may not be available to students who study elsewhere. As part of their courses, students are consistently exposed to the career that they are training for and aspiring to achieve. For example, our construction students undertake regular site visits in order to actively apply knowledge from the classroom to the worksite. The students below gained the opportunity to apply their design and construction knowledge to explore buildings using the ‘Passivhaus’ design. Tutors engage with employers to deliver curricula on-site and apply real-world application resulting in outstanding learning experiences that students will remember and apply in their assessments. From our internal survey in 2021, 85% of students commented that as a result of their course, they understood how their theoretical learning was applied to the workplace. Throughout our curriculum, students gain these opportunities to apply real-life working scenarios, building their confidence to stand out in the workplace and maximising their career outcomes and their success in their sector. For example, students comments consistently demonstrate the positive impact of trips and visits. For example, Student A – TeacherEd – “We’ve had a trip to the University, so we can feel even more connected to that environment. We will also attend a conference there in April and network with other students and practitioners. We will be presenting an essay-based poster within our own subject areas“. Student B – Fashion – “As part of the course, we will be taking part in a fashion show and have to produce a made-to-fit garment as part of an assignment. I’ plan to make my garments to fit me, and build my portfolio to gain future work“. Student C – Graphic Design – “On our course, we do competitions and briefs for real world companies. This is how the graphic design industry works where it’s a multi-stage process with feedback, work, more feedback etc.”

## **2.9 Curriculum, Staff Development and Enhancement**

Our Courses are taught by **world-leading subject experts** who embed knowledge and teach skills. We are proud of all of our staff and how they maximise the success of each of our learners and are qualified teachers. We are currently in the process of supporting three cohorts of staff per year in achieving their Higher Education Academy Fellowship status, working towards a vision where all higher education teaching staff hold or are working towards fellowship status as an expected step in their professional development. Our curriculum is deeply enriched by colleagues who are often **dual professionals** working in their sector and promoting teaching pedagogy. This allows them to enrich their delivery by utilising real-life working examples to expose learners both to up-to-date theory and industry practice, resulting in high-quality teaching, learning and assessment. From our internal survey in 2022, 83% of students said they found their course intellectually stimulating, and indicated that the course had challenged them to achieve their best. Student comments consistently demonstrate positive feedback with their tutors for example; Students stated that “professional practice is often discussed, and I like how it is woven into the course. It makes it feel very connected to the real world of working as a designer”.

We believe in the power of lifelong learning for our staff. Staff development is a key driver for high-quality teaching and learning across the College. The College invests significantly in developing our colleagues to provide outstanding learning opportunities for students. Departments and individuals develop their skills through our local partnerships with employers that allow them to upskill with the latest techniques and industry standards. This allows them to embed these practices for our students to provide high-quality teaching and learning. In addition, colleagues are funded to complete their teaching qualifications and where appropriate Masters level study to ensure that high-quality teaching pedagogy is embedded in our practice. Staff development days are provided to all colleagues twice per year, in addition to weekly Golden Hour training sessions that allow colleagues to reflect on practice and plan their own development. A centrally coordinated, cross-college team of Advanced Teaching Practitioners lead and support the teaching, learning and assessment practices in each subject area across the Group. This, along with our coaching and mentoring programme ensures that cross college priorities as well as targeted training and support are provided to maximum effect. The sum of these training opportunities allows our colleagues to continue to raise the standards of our delivery and provision, equipping our teams with the necessary teaching strategies and industry practices to suit the needs of their particular student cohorts.

The College’s Teacher Toolkit and Higher Education Conference drive our higher education ethos across the College. Each of these events allows practitioners to develop new practices that enhance their teaching and learning while underpinning their foundation knowledge in the College ‘process and pedagogy’ approach to teaching and learning. Our ‘Bedford Research Innovation on Fund’ (BRIEF) initiative drives quality improvement by funding practitioners to undertake quality improvement and to develop their teaching and pedagogy practices. These projects focus on improving teaching and strengthening our student experience. Practitioners, for example, have created pedagogical research into the embedding of technology in the classroom and sharing their outputs with HE in FE sector through a YouTube channel for other practitioners. A second project’s outputs are currently being used to shape early career teacher support across the group. Initiatives such as these improve and build our ethos of research, which informs our policies and practices at the College and in the HE in FE sector. CPD underpins our College’s Quality Framework with ‘Risk It!’ Projects as their central pillar. Each practitioner carries out a Risk It! project as part of their professional development to fine tune their teaching practices. The framework requires them to share their new-found skill or

knowledge with others in the College. The College has provided funding and opportunity to over 20 colleagues over the last year. For example, one practitioner used the funding to develop the YouTube channel mentioned previously to share good practices with other teachers outside of the college. Another interviewed new teachers about their induction process, which has led to changes at the policy level: a positive example of research-informed policy development. This approach has fostered significant improvements in teaching, learning and assessment, leading to positive impacts on student experience.

## **2.10 Competition-rich curriculum design**

Our curriculum design and innovations have led to students winning **international and national competitions that are embedded** into their courses. Our students are award-winning across many of our subject disciplines. For example, each year students enter the International Creative Conscience Awards, in which                      and                      were selected and awarded in the Graphic Design category from over 1,000 entries from universities and art colleges worldwide.

Students on our courses build submissions individually and together to submit to competitions, working with local employers to enhance their skills through innovative experimental workshops. Competition entries make all our students stand out to employers and the sector, enhancing their skills and experience. Our students have competed and won in many categories, such as Higher Education Student of the Year. From our internal survey in 2019, 85% of students positively commented that their courses provided them with opportunities to grow their skills and become ready for employment. 85% of students also responded positively that assessment and feedback on their course allowed them to demonstrate their skills. Our students commented for example, Student A – Business - ““Timely formative feedback is always provided to allow us to submit our best work and to improve our work in the future” Assessments briefs are clear and related to the business management career I am looking to move into”. Student B – Fashion – “I tried studying at University, but It didn’t work for me. The tutors on my course have time to talk to me, to work with me and to help me to achieve. They use formative feedback to support us throughout the course. I’m pushing for merits and even some distinctions, having in the past aimed only for passes”.

## **2.11 Academic Skills Embedded into the Curriculum**

As part of our course's core values, we place emphasis on the importance of developing student's **academic and research skills**. The College has a dedicated Study Skills team that supports students at both a group tutorial and 1-1 level. This has enhanced the student experience by supporting those skills that our students often struggle with. In addition, the College also has a dedicated Research and Scholarship Lead who provides tutorials and 1-1 support for students and staff alike on research skills. Importantly, this has helped those students to become confident with research, an area in which many lack confidence. The support put in place provides an opportunity for students to find gaps in current research on which to focus their own studies, supporting those who intend to pursue research in their career. Our curriculum provides opportunities through work-based learning and research dissertations for our graduates to differentiate themselves from other students. By focusing on employer-led problems and solutions we can provide original and challenging experiences. Pleasingly, in 2022 Student commented consistently about the value of our academic and research skills coaching and support. Psychology students stated, "I would say the college is a supportive learning environment. We have access to a good amount of digital resources for research. In addition, Student A and B - Teacher Ed - "The reading lists were provided at the start of the course and the digital and physical resources, along with electronic resources via our partner university VLE, is strong and is always available." Student A - Graphic Design - "The college environment with smaller groups and a more personalised experience has been much better for me, with more tutor time and that wasn't the case from my university experience which was far less personable and interactive. Studying at the college has been much more engaging and a better learning environment, and I am aiming for distinctions on the course". Student B - Fashion - "I tried studying at University, but It didn't work for me. The tutors on my course help with providing resources and work in a way that suits me. Using DSA also has made a real difference and is helping me to get to the level I am capable of. The tutors are great at supporting me to push myself, supporting me all the way."



## **2.12 Student Feedback Embedded Curriculum**

We have **robust student feedback processes** that place the student at the heart of our decision-making. Students have feedback mechanisms through our representative student system, led by our Lead HE student representative, along with through our formal student liaison process. Feedback is gathered at regular intervals, focusing on different aspects as the academic year progresses. The Autumn Survey focuses on initial impressions, the tutorial experience and college facilities. This then progresses to study skills, academic support, assessment and feedback before moving on to career development support and guidance. Student representatives are engaged through Directorate Meetings, providing opportunities to deliver feedback to senior leaders enabling them to facilitate and drive change. Our HE Lead Student Representative is a member of the College Higher Education Steering Group and provides feedback directly to the College Executive. The Higher Education Steering Group directly feeds into the College Governance Structure. These structures reinforce the importance of student feedback and allows senior leaders to put the students at the heart of their decision-making. From our internal survey, which includes all of the Higher Education Students in 2019/20/21, over 89% of students agreed that our student representative system effectively represents the student's voice. In addition, 86% of students indicated positively that the College values the opinions of students, with 83% saying they had the right opportunities to provide feedback about their course. We continue to enhance our student feedback processes with students to ensure high-quality teaching and learning are consistent across the College and maximising student success.

The College has made recent significant investments that have directly impacted student experience, teaching, learning and assessment. Over recent years the College has secured funding to build the Advanced Engineering and Construction Centre, which has enhanced our engineering and construction provision and provided students with bespoke teaching and learning space, designed specifically to the course needs. The College has also recently invested in a "curriculum for the future" by installing state of the art Modern Methods of Construction facilities. This development significantly enhances our Digital Technologies, Building, Fabrication and Welding, Environmental Technologies and Low Carbon Technology provision to equip students in what is a rapidly evolving workplace. This investment now exposes our learners to cutting-edge industry standard equipment and provides modern, high-quality learning spaces that positively impact the student experience. From our internal survey, which includes all Higher Education Students in 2019/20/21, over 83% stated that resources had enhanced their learning and skill development. In another positive development, the

scoring of our library resources are on a positive upwards trend, which is a priority for continued improvement.

### **2.13 Employer Engagement Embedded Curriculum**

The College has a focus on developing the strategic partnership with local employers. We work with over eight hundred regional employers to meet their needs. Our Courses have been developed to ensure that students develop skills and knowledge that support the local community. For example, our expansion into Higher Level Technical Qualifications and our Degree Programmes in engineering results from our local community's expansion into engineering. As part of our work with employers, we hold Employer and Community events for these stakeholders to feed the curriculum. It ensures our curriculum is at the front of industry needs. It also gives our students access to work placements, live project briefs and employment, and it also increases the student experience and the positive outcomes for students after their programme.

### **2.14 Physical Resources**

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Drawing on feedback from students, we have maintained our programme of significant improvements to our physical resources across the College Group. Significantly, all of our developments fit within the ambitious sustainability goals set out in our Strategic Plan which includes 25% of our estate being carbon neutral by 2027 and with our newest building being entirely carbon neutral. Our river water heat pumps, extensive solar panels, smart controls and BERA funded sustainability and climate change project identify us as leaders in sustainable practices in the sector. As we continue to drive up our work with local employers and communities, we have invested in locally important disciplines to develop our estates. We noted from our NSS and Internal Survey results that students wanted more cutting-edge facilities in their discipline. As part of our Capital Grants and Course Approval process, we have prioritised resources in Higher Education. In recent years we have undertaken significant facilities redevelopment, for example in the Modern Methods of Construction Centre mentioned earlier, our Engineering Centre, the new Zoological Education Centre and our

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Wellingborough Campus development. Our work on the redevelopment of the Cauldwell Campus is well underway, and we are investing over 10 million pounds in enhancing facilities to improve the student experience. All of these projects have been driven by student feedback, including the significant sustainability focus outlined in the Strategic Plan, and inclusion of improved common rooms and communal areas throughout. Student feedback indicated a desire for cutting edge technologies to be central to new developments. Our most recent project focuses on the College's farm and will include innovative and advanced technology available to farmers and growers at the forefront of their sectors practice including GPS/Satellite imagery, robotics, aquaponics and the use of drones. These new facilities will promote an industry and employment-centred ethic to inspire and educate students and industry representatives in current and novel technologies. The investments will significantly improve the learner experience and enable us to be at the forefront of technological development.

### **Section 3 Student Outcomes**

#### **3.1 Continuation**

The College has focused on providing high-quality teaching and learning through initiatives that impact students and their outcomes. Through our tutorial programme and risk management of students, we have monitored and provided support to particular groups of students that have struggled with their studies. Our average continuation rate of 84.7(TEF Metric Overall Indicator -Time Series) indicates a positive trajectory with students continuing their studies. COVID has impacted this, but we are working hard to maintain these positive levels. As with other institutions, we are currently identifying long-term and consistent student concerns over mental health and welfare (TEF Metric 81.7% – Age on Entry Continuation). We have continued to tailor and shape our interventions to support these needs and have secured additional resources in our student services and counselling teams to ensure that students have access to the support they need whilst studying with us.

Through our Access and Participation Plan, the College has implemented monitoring to ensure all students can achieve their potential. Support and interventions may be in the form of additional tutorial support, in line with our HE Tutorial policy, where all students are flagged and tracked by particular characteristics but also in terms risk ratings identified by staff. Our continuation for ethnically diverse students is now above the benchmark, with students from Asian, Black and Mixed backgrounds achieving above the sector average for continuation. This flag in our student management system monitors additional indicators such as poor attendance and tutorial concerns giving tutors and managers the intelligence to intervene. This allows Course Managers to monitor particular groups of students and implement our support framework, which includes study skills, coaching and tutorials. We do, however, know that particular industries and subjects are challenging, such as Education, Business and

Psychology. In these disciplines, we often find that students find employment while on their courses, particularly in Business Courses. We have therefore implemented reviews of our curriculum to implement part-time and blended provision that supports workplace learning. Our work in this area has positively impacted our continuation rate. For example, our work with ABC Q1/2/3 students' continuation is above the sector benchmark at 85.6%. College Senior Leaders monitor continuation metrics closely as part of the College's Performance Management Processes to ensure intervention for continuation where required.

Our positive continuation rates are supported by initiatives in the curriculum that have supported our positive continuation strategy. For example, our tutorial and 1-1 support offered to all students provide them with a personal tutor, study skills tutor, subject expert support and research support. Our tutorial support directly intervenes with students at risk of non-continuation, and we can implement a wrap-around service as described above to ensure they receive the support they need. Our internal surveys from 2019-2021 of all participants on undergraduate programmes indicate that 83% of students received sufficient support and advice as part of their courses. They have also indicated (84%) that their learning has benefitted positively from these interventions. We do recognise that our student intakes each year change by characteristic and we are continuously working to deliver high-quality outcomes for students. We recognise that further work is needed in particular subject disciplines to meet the standards achieved by others. We monitor these changes closely while recruiting students to ensure that we can support each student's higher education journey. These indicators identify those students particularly from a widening participation background who study at the College are successful and complete their studies.

### **3.2 Completion**

Our student completion rate is 78.3% (TEF Metric – Overall Completion Indicator). It is important to note the context of our learners and the distance that individuals have travelled from their starting points. For example, our 21+ students have a completion rate of 81.1% (TEF Metric – Overall Completion Indicator) despite this category of learner often balancing college work alongside wider commitments outside of their studies. In some cases, our completion rate for particular disciplines is stronger than the sector average, for example, Creative Arts at 89.9%, Engineering at 87.9%, and Psychology at 81.5% (TEF Metric – Overall Completion Indicator). It is significant to highlight that our activities with employers in these areas are substantial, evidenced by our work with over a thousand employers across the region. Through high-quality teaching and learning that encompasses external speakers, networking and live briefs, students are equipped with enhanced employability skills ready for the workplace. Often sessions such as master classes promote our ethos to learners about the importance of completing their studies and the potential this has to boost their future careers.

The College actively works through its Access and Participation Plan to target groups at risk of non-completion, for example our work with students from diverse ethnic groups, where completion is above the sector average at 73.2% for Black students and Mixed Students at 73.6 (TEF Metric – Overall Completion Indicator). Our focused tutorial strategy and interventions ensure that students from particular groups and any student at risk has an appropriate level of intervention to ensure their study continues where possible and they successfully complete their course. In addition, our work and intervention with students from IMD Q1/Q2 has resulted in above average scores of 74.2%. From our early intervention at the

recruitment and interview stages of the student journey, we can identify any potential risk to their study and implement support strategies in a timely manner.

We recently introduced Top up Degrees to our provision and have seen many students progressing from their initial level 4 or 5 qualification to achieve at level 6. This has helped to increase the completion of students on level 4 and 5 programmes, rising to our current 78.3%. We have seen positive student outcomes for degree attainment in the last four years, with over 70% of students since 2019 achieving good final degrees in high-demand skill areas such as engineering and agriculture. This, in turn, has strengthened our position with local, regional and national employers as a provider that delivers outstanding teaching, student experience and outcomes.

We are currently focusing on improving completion in our Business disciplines and Sports by engaging with students and employers to ensure that the curriculum is focused and engaging and that students have local progression opportunities, particularly in Sports where fewer local opportunities for graduates existed in local businesses. In addition, we are working with our partner university to ensure that students utilise the university and our own support framework to complete their studies with their personal best outcomes.

### **3.3 Progression**

Our progression data shows positively the distance that particular groups of students have travelled from their starting points. Often these students have come from widening participation backgrounds, be that 'first in the family' to study higher education or mature learners re-entering education. In addition to our subject mix, there are particular industries where students will be in lower-paid or seasonal roles, such as Agriculture and Animal Sciences, which has impacted the progression metric. In contrast, there are subject disciplines above the sector average, such as Performing Arts, and there is a clear correlation between the county profile and the progression opportunities for these students. For example, Bedford, as discussed above, has a larger Creative Arts Community and therefore supports stronger progression outcomes. Work is being undertaken to engage those local and regional employers to provide progression pathways for those identified above with lower rates. For example, on our short courses for professional bodies, students often progress to the next level of study or secure promotion. In contrast to the metrics, there is a positive progression for students aged 21+ (60%) above the sector benchmark (54%). We are proud that our provision delivers for students the progression that leads to their chosen careers. Over the last four years, there has been an overall reduction in the gap of progression to professional

employment or further study of over 34 pp. There remains a gap for our students in our PGCE programme with progression. We have identified that students in this particular course often

start their careers as Associate Lecturers rather than in full-time posts as they join the teaching profession. We have actively focused on recruitment events that aim to build trainees' confidence through interview practice and ensure that they are equipped for their tough first year of teaching.

Our Higher Education courses are designed with employers and informed by student engagement to ensure they prepare students well for employment. Often many students, as part of their preparations for employment, actively consider and often seek self-employment, particularly in our Creative Arts and Agricultural courses where our employer 'live' briefs allow students to paid for freelance work during their assessments. The wrap-around support offered by our Student Services and LIVE Team is used

more by this particular group of students and has positively impacted their studies. From our internal surveys in 2019-2021, 83% of all undergraduate students indicated that their course encouraged them to think about their career planning and aspirational career targets. In addition, 82% of students believe that their course gave them the opportunities to improve.

thought she had missed out on the chance to pursue her creative calling when life got in the way,

Our HE courses meant that she was able to balance both of those commitments. As evidence of the high standards achieved on our courses,

said "The work submitted by Bedford College students was outstanding, and we want to do more community collaborations with them as we go forward." The links with our employers across our curriculum and how we work with our local community add strength to our student experience for learners by providing high-impact learning related to their future careers. In addition, our work in specialist areas, such as Outdoor Education students, leaves them equipped with the necessary skills to navigate their industry. , Outdoor Adventure Student, said, "I am currently working

. Studying HE at the College has given me the framework I needed to help me develop my career in outdoor education. I am now training others to work in the industry and playing my part in helping lead the team in planning and providing activities for customers at the Centre. My time at College has been instrumental in developing my career."

***Reflections from the Higher Education Lead Student Representative Team,***

The Bedford College Group is passionate about leading exceptional Teaching and Learning that delivers educational excellence by providing the best student opportunities. This submission provides a key summary of the examples of the College's commitment to developing teaching and its dedication to enhancing and improving learning that improves the lives of students and its local communities.

I have enjoyed putting this submission together and gathering student feedback to support it with the team to ensure that student's voices are heard and reflect our experience at the College. During my time at the college, it has been evident that core values have been implemented to ensure the student's best interests. For example, investments in facilities that have directly improved the student experience by providing students with the latest technology.

I have ensured that the student's voice is at the heart of this submission and demonstrates the real progress they make on their journeys whilst studying with the college, but also the college's passion and dedication to their students, community and local development. The submission provides the panel with real-life examples of the experience for students on a day-to-day basis and the many opportunities we are exposed to as part of our time at college. It has shown me that college is about more than just my studies. I am pleased that the college's survey, which includes all Higher Education students, showed that 92% of students felt their programme is intellectually stimulating. It challenges them to achieve their best work. The College survey results mark a noticeable difference to students, immersing them in high-quality teaching and learning and is driven by student's voices.

I am pleased to have understood more about the entire College and the student body. The recent surveys of all higher education students across the college highlight the significant positive progress that has happened with the student experience across the College. I am most pleased that 92% of students agreed or strongly agreed that staff at the college valued the students' opinions and feedback regarding the College and their courses, which reflects the work on student voice undertaken over the last 18 months. The introduction of this role as the Lead Higher Education Student Representative helped ensure that the voice of Higher

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Education students is represented and is a driver for continued change in what is a supportive, positive and multifaceted College.

From the submission, these are my key takeaways;

1. The College places the student at the heart of its decision-making and demonstrates its commitment to high-quality teaching and learning by ensuring a high-quality student experience.
2. The College includes the voice of all its students, not just those in the National Student Survey. It has actively developed mechanisms that enhance the student experience for the present and the future.
3. There is a significant investment in promoting opportunities locally through campus developments that expand courses to suit student and employer demand. These developments place the learner at the heart of influence and decision making for example, with new student social spaces.
4. The College has a strength where students are supported to progress from Level 3 courses, choose to study locally and have fantastic employment outcomes, exemplified by, but not limited to the fantastic competition winners in the Arts.

From reading this submission, you will get a sense of the high-quality teaching, learning and assessment that students receive at the College and how this has positively impacted student outcomes, whether in their employment or further studies. I am proud to have played my part in this journey.

***Lead Higher Education Student***



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## **Section 4**

### **4.1 References**

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