ICON College of Technology and Management

1. Provider Context

1.1 Educational Mission and Strategic Aims

ICON College of Technology and Management is an independent Higher Education provider in East London, offering Higher National Diploma (HND) qualifications awarded by Pearson (Edexcel), across its five departments (Business and Management, Health and Social Care, Information Technology, Travel & Tourism and Hospitality Management, and Education & Training- started in April 2022), and Bachelor Degrees validated by Falmouth University in Business and Management, Computing, and Tourism and Hospitality Management. We have around 1,300 HE students, all studying on full-time programmes.

Established in 2003, ICON College of Technology and Management Ltd (ICON College) initially aimed to provide opportunities for students to gain higher education qualifications at affordable fees, and to made university education more accessible.

Our vision is to be an inclusive, high-quality, and independent London-based Higher Education provider, working from our own campus within five years and progressing towards the attainment of degree awarding powers. Our mission is to:

- Provide accessible Higher Education for students aligned to socio-economic requirements and employability.
- Raise and widen educational participation in East London and beyond.
- Equip students with marketable skills for effective and rewarding careers.
- Offer an educational experience that maximises student support, thus ensuring students reach their full potential.

The College operates from premises on the eastern edge of the city of London, in a neighbourhood characterised by being the home of a large South Asian community. The College site has been adapted for educational purposes to include lecture rooms, computer labs, library, student common room, student welfare and refectory services, together with associated administrative offices.

In 2020 ICON College changed its structure and governance, including bye laws, to set up a unified governing body with external membership. In addition to the already existing Academic Board, it created an Audit Committee, Finance Committee, and a Management Board. ICON also has a new Strategic Plan which has been developed to ensure that the College is well governed and managed; has a culture focussed on widening participation and student success; offers high quality education and qualifications that result in progression to meaningful employment; and provides the resources to achieve our goals.

The ICON College Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (2021/25) explicitly recognises the needs of a diverse student population, and embeds the inclusivity principles set out in the 'Framework for Student Access, Retention, Attainment and Progression' developed by Advance HE. Delivering a high-quality learning experience, which ensures the continuation and success of all of our students, eliminates attainment gaps, and facilitates meaningful progression for students, is at the heart of this Strategy. It recognises the contribution of all staff, academic departments and professional services to the student experience. The College is embedding employer-led,

challenge-based teaching and learning, through partnerships and collaborative activity with employers, alumni, industry and community organisations. The aims of the ICON College Learning and Teaching Strategy are:

- **Teaching**: To provide effective and student-centred teaching that is informed by good practice and scholarship
- **Learning**: To ensure that learning encourages a gradual shift from a taught to a self-learning approach, better equipping students for the world of work.
- **Assessment**: To have appropriate, fair and accurate assessment of learning.
- **Educating**: To ensure a systematic relationship among content development, teaching, learning and assessment.

1.2 Size and Shape of the provision

In the period between 2017/18 to 2020/21 ICON College has recruited 5,860 learners who are in the scope of this TEF submission. This consists of an annual cohort of 1,090 in 2017/18, growing each year to 1,750 in 2020/21. Until 2020/21 the population was exclusively undergraduates on HNDs, but from 2020/21 these were joined by 380 first degree students, who formed 21.5% of that year's cohort. This means that in the review period 93.6% of students were on HND and 6.4% on a first degree. All are studying full-time.

All students are studying on applied programmes, the majority in Business and Management, which also includes (Travel & Tourism, and Hospitality) (79.9%), 530 (9%) in Computing, and 650 (11.1%) in Health and Social Care.

A major distinctive aspect of ICON College's student demographics is that the majority are mature students. Only 3.7% of the population for the whole period under review were aged under 21, and 54.1% of the rest were over 30 years old. The majority also enter with either Access (35.7%) or non-UK qualifications (53.4%), or equivalent. The College leadership team always seeks to take this population into account when designing the learning and teaching approaches and student support strategies. These are discussed in detail in sections 2 and 3.

The gender profile during the review period was almost balanced (59% women and 41% men). The vast majority of students record that their ethnicity is White (82.2%), but with significant minorities recording that they are Asian (7.1%) or Black (9%). Very few students declare a disability (1.6%) and 71.5% of students do not wish to declare their sexual orientation. The College is putting in measures for students to feel more comfortable in declaring their demographic profile, particularly those factors which may warrant extra support in their studies. We have set out our commitment to this in our Access and Participation Plan (APP).

In summary, the College specialises in helping students without traditional educational qualifications or a previous opportunity to gain access to HE-level education, and helps them to study on vocational degrees which will help their careers. The majority of students are European UK-domiciled students, and many are from areas of high deprivation (60.9% from Quintiles 1 and 2).

1.3 Context of the submission

This submission was produced as a collaborative effort across the College. The senior management team set up a project team consisting of the Principal, the Vice-Principal (Academic), the Managing Director, and the Secretary to the Board.   These staff used an external facilitator to help them step back and reflect more objectively on their contextual data and student outcomes. In undertaking this process, the project team also drew on further internal qualitative and quantitative data, including but not exclusively, the annual ICON College Student Feedback Survey

2022/23 (the 13th in the series, which had 384 responses relating to 30 lecturers and course units selected on a random basis across each department), and the Pearson Academic Management Review (AMR) 2021/22. In our APP we identified that we lacked institutional surveys and qualitative evidence that we can draw upon. The work we have been undertaking to improve our internal data and evidence collection to help us better assess our performance, understand our students' experiences and improve our outcomes has been important in creating context for this submission.

Once the submission was drafted it was shared with further staff and students. As part of the production of this document, a pool of elected student representatives was contacted and consulted about their academic experience at ICON College of Technology and Management. The students had the opportunity to submit their views on the quality of the educational experience and outcomes.

Most of them agreed that the institution delivered top-quality courses that allowed them to successfully achieve their career goals. They also complimented the Academic Team and emphasized how supportive and understanding they have been throughout the years. Not only were they admired for being hardworking, but also friendly and kind. "At ICON we work with highly qualified, devoted lecturers who make huge efforts to attain to the best standards, they are talented and inspiring." In addition to this, they valued tutors that provided engaging lessons by using a variety of teaching methodologies.

Students further added that as a learner being exposed to different teaching styles boosted their academic performance and encouraged an inclusive and collaborative space. Additionally, the personal tutoring system has ensured students' success in their courses. They showed appreciation for the teaching equipment and other facilities available on the premises, such as the library and computer labs, that supported their learning and progress.

They highlighted that studying at ICON has brought them excellent professional opportunities and allowed them to grow personally. They were grateful for the dedicated admin team and the schedule arrangements that allowed our busy adult students to get a chance to learn - which benefitted them by making them feel well-prepared for the current market. As to student experience, they felt welcomed and comfortable within the academic environment due to the diverse and inclusive communities present at the College. Furthermore, the students shared that they are seen and heard by the College thanks to their active participation in various committees that allowed them to voice their opinions throughout the semester.

2. Student Experience

ICON College is proud of the consistent and longstanding excellence of the experience it offers its students. In NSS 2022 all metrics, including response rate, were above the sector average, and notably satisfaction with assessment and feedback and learning community were around 20% above. These results are evidence of our ethos of investing in each students' learning journey, both as individuals and as part of wider programme cohorts.

2.1 NSS 2022
Teaching on our course, as measured by the NSS, was 4% above benchmark at the time of our last TEF submission, and we have continued to build on this. In 2022 teaching on our course was rated at 88.61%, more than 8% above the sector. Within this are overall satisfaction scores of 100% for Health and Social Care, 93% for Hospitality Management, and 90.26% in Business & Management.

In our previous submission, we noted that the academic support indicator was 2.6% above the benchmark, and that we were seeking to improve this further by introducing measures to support the development of students' skills in academic writing. We have followed through on our intention to introduce four new measures to address this:

a) Reintroducing one full day academic writing skills as part of the student induction session at the start of the semester.
b) Introduction of academic writing during the tutorial sessions.
c) Introduction of the English Language Development Unit (ELDU) that is concentrating on English language support and academic writing during the tutorial sessions.
d) Monitor and review student writing skills in their assignments at the end of each semester and arrange more writing workshops, if necessary.

These actions have had the desired effect on the student satisfaction with their academic support, and in the NSS 2022 the satisfaction score was 84.32%, 10% above the sector. This includes 95.7% overall in Health & Social Care, including 100% in advice, study skills and ability to provide feedback, as well as 100% from Hospitality students commenting on how changes are communicated. We continue to review approaches to improve things even further, building on the well-developed pastoral support and guidance system which is available to a diverse range of students, allowing them to engage fully with their studies to fulfil their potential. This was commended in our previous TEF assessment. We expect the increased investment in individual support, particularly via the Administrative Academic Support Officer will improve satisfaction further.

During the period under review by the TEF, 1,910 students were eligible to complete the NSS and there was a 75.4% response rate. This response rate did not vary much across the four years. Of the students in the eligible cohort the demographic was as follows:

Table 1: (Source TEF data)

	Number	Percentage of cohort
Business and Management	1,500	78.5%
Computing	160	8.4%
Health and Social Care	250	13.1%
Aged under 21	60	3.1%
Aged 21-30	770	40.3%
Aged 31 and over	1,080	56.6%
Asian	140	7.3%
Black	190	9.9%
White	1,550	81.2%
Female	1,210	63.4%
Male	700	36.6%
IMD Quintiles 1 and 2	1,170	61.3%
IMD Quintiles 3,4 and 5	740	38.7%
Declaring a disability	30	1.6%

2.2 Teaching on my course
Overall, during the review period, the level of satisfaction with teaching on my course was a high 89.2%, very similar to the benchmark of 90.1%. Despite having to change our teaching approach during the pandemic to a totally online experience, we did not compromise on the methods of teaching which are appropriate for our unique cohort. The College had not engaged in any online

delivery before, and was required to establish protocols, procedures and methodologies of teaching online in a way which would still suit our student demographics.

From April to July 2020 we adopted emergency measures, but during the summer session we were able to put our online teaching on a firmer footing, offering CPD workshops for all staff and updating all documentation. We recorded all our lecture notes, but continued to run all lectures live, even though online, and concentrated into two days a week. This was well received, and attendance and engagement were very good, in some ways better than it had been previously face-to-face. By September 2020 we had developed stronger communication channels with students which, together with our greater knowledge of new applications for technology, have continued to develop ever since.

ICON College's Learning and Teaching Strategy strongly encourages the embedding of inclusive teaching practices. For example, academics:

- Are encouraged to use a wide variety of teaching styles and technologies to address different learning styles in a diverse physical/online learning environment
- Ensure that teaching material is available in electronic form, online on ICON VLE
- Are encouraged to create a collaborative environment which facilitates student interaction, such as setting the ground rules for discussion, or attending to inclusive seating arrangements

The College encourages the sharing of good practice amongst staff through peer observations, ICON VLE, and CPD sessions (commended by the AMR Report 2021/22). We are committed to ensuring that all staff involved in supporting learning are provided with the training, resources, time for scholarly activities and development to ensure that their teaching practice is evidence-based and employs up-to-date learning tools and technologies, particularly since the start of the pandemic. For example, all academic staff are encouraged to engage with UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) and with Advance HE activities to seek recognition. Additionally, all academic staff are encouraged to engage in research or scholarly activities. The AMR report 2021/22 confirms that it is "very interesting to note the excellent range of 'good practice' reported by each unit tutor during the Assessment Boards which undoubtedly provide significant support to new and less experienced academic staff." (p.11)

Our student feedback survey from 2022 suggests that students are highly satisfied with their lecturers. In the TEF data our students studying on Business & Management (which included those on Travel & Tourism, and Hospitality), and Health & Social Care recorded levels of satisfaction above benchmark. It was the Computing students who were less satisfied, at overall 5% below benchmark. Our student feedback shows that this was partly due to the fact that we were unable to run practical sessions face-to-face from April 2020 until spring 2021. The College did, however, run simulation sessions, which some students found less satisfying.

As recorded elsewhere, the small percentage of our cohort aged below 21 are less satisfied with their teaching than the rest of the cohort. The College is aware that younger students have different expectations and so the College is deploying their personal tutor system to provide focussed support for these students. Students in all ethnic groups were very similarly satisfied, as were those from different IMD backgrounds, but the Black students (10% of the cohort), are the most satisfied against benchmark and the male students slightly less so.

2.3 Assessment and Feedback

Again, during the review period the level of satisfaction with assessment and feedback from ICON College students remains high at 85.4%, very similar to the benchmark. Our internal student feedback from 2022 indicates that students value the very timely formative feedback that they receive, as well as the clear explanation of assignments. The satisfaction at the beginning of the review period was, however, slightly higher than in the last two years, but not significantly. The AMR Report 2021/22, however, suggest that "evidence from external examiner reports, NSS analysis, and Assessment Board minutes confirm that the College uses the outcomes of the Pearson's external monitoring to improve internal systems, process and assessment." (p.12) The pattern noted in relation to teaching also repeats itself with those in the different age groups, ethnic and IMD quintiles.

The College is conscious that, given our student demographics, we need to support learners to develop independent working and self-management skills. We do this by ensuring that:
- All students are provided with one-to-one and/or small group learning support at all levels
- All students are provided with pre and/or post-sessional support in English Language, IT, academic writing skills and referencing support.
- All students are guided on how to search for valid and relevant academic literature or industry materials
- Independent learning is encouraged from the second semester onwards
- Evidence of self-learning is expected in the second year of study, particularly in the final semester
- Books and journals related to each unit are available in the Library or Online Library, and are introduced to the relevant groups of students every semester

We particularly believe that the following examples of good practice lead to good continuation and achievement for our particular student groups, especially those who have not studied for a while:
- The students' feedback and suggestions on the assessment criteria of every module developed by the College is actively sought and appropriate adjustments are made accordingly.
- The assessment criteria for each unit is circulated amongst relevant academics every semester prior to teaching
- Feedback on assignment briefs is sought from all the academics involved in the teaching each module and an internal verifier needs to approve it before releasing it to students.
- Random but relevant groups of students read the assignment brief before it is officially released to make sure it is clear
- Assignment briefs are given to students no later than the end of the third week of the semester.
- Students are given a chance to ask for formative assessment of their assignments or presentations before the first submission deadline.

In our AMR for 2021/22, the report particularly commends "open and equal access to fair assessment for all students, including any students with particular needs". (p.10)

2.4 Academic support

ICON College students' level of satisfaction with their academic support remains the same throughout the review period, at 84.7%, about 3% below benchmark, but not significantly. Our student feedback survey 2022 commends the level of welfare support. It is this area of our provision that some groups appear to be less satisfied than others, and we believe that this has led

to the overall statistics. Students who are least satisfied are the younger students, males, at 8% and 12% below benchmark respectively, and also those studying Computing. This is the one area of our provision where this result is significant. At the Staff Student Liaison panel, discussions of the latest NSS results prompted students to say that they were far more satisfied than the NSS results appeared to indicate. We also note that the satisfaction of Computing students continues to improve. Balancing this, however, is the satisfaction of all ethnic groups which remains consistently above benchmark

Our main academic support is delivered via:

Extended induction. For the past ten years ICON College has provided compulsory induction for all new students at the beginning of each semester (September and February). This induction is intended to familiarise students with institutional processes, rules and regulations, learning and teaching resources and student support services, and time is devoted to developing academic writing and study skills. Our induction has now been expanded to include more interaction to engender a sense of belonging, developing academic confidence and skills, mental health, financial and employability support.

Personal tutoring. Our inclusive learning, teaching and assessment strategy is supported by our personal tutoring system and attendance monitoring. ICON College allocates a personal tutor to every student, and students and tutors are expected to meet once per semester. The role of the Personal Tutor incorporates academic, professional and pastoral elements. Personal Tutors refer students to College Services for additional support, but other staff can also refer. The College has recently expanded its College Services, and targeted them to groups identified as needing more support.

Academic Administrative Support Officer. We have also made an extra appointment of a member of staff to be the main point of contact between the students, heads of departments, programme managers, and academic staff, so that queries and concerns are directed quickly to the right place. She can also offer immediate support in her own capacity.

Student ambassadors and mentors who provide an effective way to assist students to develop confidence, and who can relate closely to the students' experience.

2.5 Learning Resources
Overall, over the review period ICON students rated the College learning resources at 83.2% satisfaction, about 1% below benchmark. On a closer look at the time series data, it appears the satisfaction was slightly greater in the first two years of the period, and the last year the satisfaction is 81% (5% below benchmark). Computing and Health & Social Care students appear slightly more satisfied, as do the younger students (above benchmark). This appears to show the effect of the Academic Administrative Support Officer already. Additionally, the online Library gives students the full opportunity to study from any sources they need, also from a distance and at a time which suits the student. The AMR 2021/22 commends the level of physical resources, and noted particularly that "The Centre monitors all resources regularly to ensure they are fit for purpose and safe to use." The Report also notes that there are "contractual agreements in place to ensure that external resources are available fit for purpose, appropriate for the delivery of the programme …" if needed. (p.14)

The College student feedback survey for 2022 identifies the Student Handbook and College website as highly regarded resources, as well as the library resources and the online library.

2.6 Student Voice

During the review period our students remain very slightly below benchmark in terms of their satisfaction with the student voice. We note that this was stronger at the beginning of the review period, and believe that the pandemic arrangements may have had an effect on our students, which has not been reversed yet. As stated elsewhere, our students come from backgrounds that often makes them lack both academic and confident social skills. During the pandemic many of our learning and support methodologies, particularly in relation to group working and discussion were less effective as they were not conducted face-to-face.

All our students are encouraged to make use of their voice to reflect on and where appropriate, enhance their learning experience. This is something we regard as very important in developing the social capital of our student demographic. Not every student becomes a student representative, but we encourage as many as possible to do so, and this promotes negotiation skills, constituent feedback, and a growth in maturity of outlook. It engenders a sense of responsibility for those students who take on the role. At the same time every student is invited to engage in student feedback at course and programme level. This encourages the notion that each and every student's view is important, and that students can impact their learning experience. Students are each given time within a teaching session to fill in the ICON Student Feedback Survey, and it is a short questionnaire, which means there is a very good response rate. This view is confirmed by the NSS 2022, where student voice ratings were very high, including 100% for Health and Social Care.

We ensure that we feed back survey outcomes and any new measures taken to the students' representatives to close the quality loop. This raises student confidence that their view is important and that they are active participants in the course they study.

For at least ten years we have had a student panel, composed of elected student representatives to comment on a range of College matters, for example, the development of the APP, as well as student representation on the College Board and committees. Student representatives are also elected per class, and there are 50 reps in total; diversity is encouraged in the advertising, and subsequently monitored. Every elected representative is trained to enable them to understand the role and how to undertake it effectively. The training takes place each semester, shortly after elections (this reflects the fact that there are two main intakes a year). The half-day training explains the representative system, role, duties and responsibilities and ways of collecting feedback from peers. Case studies are discussed to enable student representatives to consider how they will react to different scenarios.

The College's representation system has been commended by QAAs in all reviews; and this is reflected in ICON College's high NSS results. Our internal student feedback survey results for 2022 also report that students "feel part of the academic community and their opinion is valued." All College students are eligible to and encouraged to become members of the National Union of Students. The College is keen to support the establishment of a Students' Association. In 2019/20 a team of five student representatives began the process of establishing such an Association, but after three meetings did not continue. We remain keen to encourage our students to set one up, but ultimately, however, this is the decision of the students.

Health & Social Care students are relatively most satisfied (above benchmark), as are females (on benchmark). While of course the fact that the majority of students are female on these programmes is important, we consider that the greater individual level of attention and the hours of

practical work make the course very attractive. Additionally, once they have finished the students are very employable.

We would like to end this section by remarking on the satisfaction of our disabled students. In section 1 we noted that not many of our students declare a disability or wish to record their sexual orientation. Those who do declare a disability, however, appear to be amongst the most satisfied of our student group. Although there were only 30 of them across the review period, the results suggest that the way in which we care of each of our students as individuals has a strongly advantageous effect on such students. They recorded this strongly in their satisfaction with response to the student voice (just under 5% above benchmark). It further confirms to us that our initiative to help students feel comfortable to ask for learning support can only be beneficial to all our students.

3. Student Outcomes

3.1 Continuation

The most recent TEF data indicates that continuation is at a very high 87.7% against a benchmark of 82.8%. An analysis of the time series data behind this suggests that the first year (2017/18) was still below benchmark, but that continuation has been at 6% and 4% above benchmark in each year since, despite the TEF data indicating a doubling in the number of students studying at ICON College. We are proud of having turned a weakness into a strength over such a short period of time, and we are continuing to try to improve it further. We have set it as one of our targets in our APP, particularly for those students from IMD Quintile 1.

The College monitors attendance of students to identify any potential well-being or continuation issues, and provides them with the necessary support and confidence they need to succeed. (The Pearson AMR for 2021/22 also confirms the College's careful record keeping and "accurate and safe certification" (p.7). The AMR also reports that the College "enables applicants to discuss learning needs, additional help … and takes account of progression aspirations." (p.8)   ICON also provides financial support to help students with additional costs and those who have challenging domestic circumstances.

A detailed analysis across our three subject areas suggests that all are above benchmark for continuation across the review period. Strongest is Business and Management (2,050 learners) at 89.3% against a benchmark of 83.9%, Health and Social Care continuation is at 84.6% (benchmark 82.4%), and Computing continuation is at 78.9% (benchmark 82.4).

The Computing students appear to have different expectations about the balance of practical sessions and the more theoretical work that they learn in the classroom. Some students find the course quite challenging due to the technical nature of the subject, and some students are returning to study from different backgrounds to change their career to one in IT, so they are new to the discipline. The College is providing additional support in arranging more practical sessions both physically in the College IT Labs and via the online platform, using simulation software which students can use to practice in a time convenient to them. Also, more personal tutoring hours is being allocated to this group to improve their satisfaction and progression.

We are also proud of the high continuation rate of our mature students which is higher than mature students nationally. We have also noted in our APP that the minority cohort of BAME students in our population have consistently lower rates of continuation than White students (77.5% compared with 89%). Additionally, we have observed that this gap is most acute in those BAME students from IMD Quintiles 1 and 2. Although this gap exists in the national HE population, it is less

pronounced due to our increasingly personalise learning experience, and we are committed to minimise the difference at ICON.

3.2 Completion

In our last submission we recognised the challenges inherent in enabling mature students from disadvantaged backgrounds to complete their programmes within the two-year period of funding. At that stage we had already introduced a number of initiatives aimed at improving issues of non-continuation, low completion and low pass rates. These included:

a) Introduction of level B2 English Language requirements
b) Introduction of a personal tutoring system
c) Weekly monitoring by Heads of Department of formative feedback
d) Monitoring student attendance through fingerprinting and sending text messages followed by letters and phone calls on a weekly basis
e) Close monitoring of student progression by Heads of Department
f) Extra classes for student to attend who have low progression
g) Introduction of free English language support classes
h) Support for students who have not been able to completer their course within two years
i) Introduction of the unit review process, and
j) End of Year Best Achievers awards wherein each department recognises those individuals who have met the College's targets for progression and attendance on their courses.

At that time, the College's review of completion and retention statistics indicated that these initiatives had already produced significant improvement. For example, achievement data for students starting in 2012 and completing their course showed a significant increase in completion rates, as well as a notable increase in the proportion of students achieving merit or distinction grades. Data showed an increase in the number of students completing the programme, rising from 46.5% for students starting in 2012 to 71.25% for students starting in 2015.

We are pleased, but not surprised, that this improvement has continued, and that of the 1,440 students across the review period 72.9% are completing, against a benchmark of 69.8%. We have continued the actions set out above and the appointment of the Academic Administrative Support Officer has made a great deal of difference, as well as setting ourselves targets in our latest APP. We are not complacent.

Once again there are differences across our three discipline areas. Both Business & Management and Computing students continue to complete in percentages significantly above benchmark (71.5%, 4.8% above benchmark, and 72.9%, 7.8% above benchmark respectively), completion on Health and Social Care is just below benchmark (1.3%) at 74.4%. We believe this is for the reasons set out above, and that some of this is explained by the IMD composition of our cohorts. Our 860 learners at Quintile 1 had a completion rate of 69.7%, 5% above benchmark, and those on Quintile 2 (another 580 learners), also completed just above benchmark. We consider our success at helping such students to complete their HNDs in such numbers, is part of our responsibility, and indeed our success. We involve our students in taking responsibility for their own learning, and our Student Ambassadors help us with early intervention.

This is further evidenced by the completion rates of both our male and female students which are above benchmark, particularly our male students who performed 6.3% above benchmark. Our main concern has been our Asian students. They are one of the smallest ethnic groups in our College, and they progress to work and further study above benchmark, their completion rates are,

however, 9% lower than benchmark at 52.7% across the review period. We observe that these students have far higher levels of family commitment and pressures.

We note that the data still refers to HND students, as our first cohort of undergraduate degree students only joined in 2020/21.

3.3 Progression

The majority of progression for ICON students has historically been to top up their HND to a degree qualification. This will obviously change with the degree provision introduced in the College, particularly on the new Education programmes. The response rate of students from ICON College to the Graduate Outcomes survey has been 56.4% over the review period, dipping below 54% during the pandemic years and rising to 60.2% during the last recorded survey. Given the unique demographic of the ICON College students – mature, from high areas of deprivation and with low levels of formal qualifications – to achieve above benchmark progression to work and further study is a testament to our staff. Over the review period the progression of ICON students is 47.6%, 2.1% above the benchmark of 45.5%. This hide, however, a slight dip during the pandemic and a strong improvement in the last year to 49.8% progression, 5.7% above the benchmark of 44.1%. It seems that at a time when other institutions have seen a drop-in progression, ICON has managed to create the reverse, while nearly doubling the number of students.

We have appointed a strategic lead for careers and employability, and established the ICON College's Employer Forum, which assists in identifying placements and employment opportunities. All students have access to career counselling at the College. To expand this service further, the College has recruited Academic Careers and Employability Networking Managers. The College has also established the Centre for Research and Enterprise Development (CRED) to provide free advice to SMEs and local unemployed people. The College student feedback survey for 2022 demonstrates that "the majority of the students are of the opinion that taking a course in the College has improved their career prospects but they are not so convinced that the career advice services and further study opportunities available in the College." (p4) Looking at the verbatim comments some of this seems to be that they would like a top-up degree. This is something that the College has now started doing.

This picture, however, hides some differences in progression from different groups of students. While ICON College's Health and Social Care students progress at 56.4%, 2.1% above benchmark. These students are supported to use the Professional Learning and Development portfolio (PLAD) as a tool for developing their practice-based skills and experience. For Business and Management students, who form the majority of the cohort, progression at 44.0%, 2.3% below cohort. This is, however, effected by the inclusion of Travel & Tourism in these figures. It is our small group of Computing students (40 in the review period) who progress less well to work or further study, with a progression rate of 46.9%, against a benchmark of 61.2%. They, are all, however, already working and so these statistics may not be relevant to their aspirations.

This difference across subject areas explains to some extent the difference in progression of students across gender. While female students' progression rate at 51.1% is above the benchmark of 46% in the review period, males' progression is much lower at 39.8%, against a benchmark of 44.2%. The majority of female students study Health and Social Care, while male students study on Business, Management and Computing.

For an institution which focusses on teaching predominantly mature students, we are particularly proud that the proportion of ICON College students who progress to employment and further study is consistently above the benchmark of 45.7% (at 46.9% for those over 30 and 48% for those 21-30). This is due to students wishing to top up their HND to a degree. The numbers of students below 21 are too low to produce statistics for the TEF, but our own data shows that they perform as well as their older counterparts and in line with the sector.

Another important factor to note is that our Asian and Black students, the minority of our cohort at 50 and 170 students respectively in total during the review period, record progression to work and further study above benchmark, and our white students are on benchmark. In our APP we have noted that the number of BAME students in our cohort has declined from 37% in 2016/17 to 9% in 2020/21, and we have set ourselves targets to ensure that we reverse this decline, and that we make sure that BAME students can perform as successfully as our majority white population.

3.4 Educational Gains

In summary, we believe that the qualitative and quantitative evidence set out in this TEF submission demonstrates that ICON College of Technology and Management is achieving at high level the overarching educational gains we have determined for our students. These are:

Enhancing opportunities for individuals by giving students, most of whom come from the locality, a second chance. Many of our students enter the College with moderate qualifications. From talking to the students, it is reasonable to infer that many of them have not fully benefitted from the education system up to this point. We seek to ensure that everyone makes good this previous deficit with our support.

Rebuilding confidence in students' academic ability. The majority of our students enter the College with an expectation that learning is going to be delivered in a similar fashion to that they received in the state system in which they did not always thrive. We use the induction period to change this attitude and identify that our approach is going to be different. This is their first learning gain.

They learn, in the induction programme and in the early months of their course, that **responsibility for their learning will pass from the College to the student**. Over time, each student is expected to take more responsibility for their own learning. Through the delivered Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy the majority of our students move towards independence, great self-direction, and become autonomous learners. This is their second learning gain. We are fully aware that level six programmes of study will further develop their autonomy, and we have incorporated this ethos into the degree programmes that we are now running.

As previously stated, we adopt a number of approaches to learning, including case study analysis, group work, presentations, seminars, committee work etc, that focus on both academic theoretical input, as well as practical applications geared towards student employability. In this respect, we often see an unconfident, unassertive student with low expectations and esteem entering the College, but **leaving with confidence and ready for employment in a range of occupations based on the width of our academic offer.** Through the diverse range of assignments, classroom experiences, peer cohesion and review, as well as external speakers and subject-related visits, students develop a range of skills that equip them for the world of work. These skills include marketing themselves to obtain employment, and having both knowledge and high level skills, as well as the motivation to perform well in employment. This is their third learning gain.

Overall, on completion of the course, the majority of students move on to higher degrees or employment. They depart with enhanced confidence, greater written and oral communication skills, assertiveness and strong employability skills.

4. References

ICON College of Technology and Management, Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy (2021/2025)

ICON College of Technology and Management, Access and Participation Plan (APP) 2022/23-2026/27

ICON College Student Feedback Survey 2022/23

ICON College Pearson Annual Management Review (AMR) 2021/22

'Framework for Student Access, Retention, Attainment and Progression' developed by Advance HE. https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/framework-student-access-retention-attainment-and-progression-higher-education