DN COLLEGES GROUP

DN Colleges Group Provider Submission TEF 2023

1. Provider context

DN Colleges Group (DNCG) was established in November 2017 following the merger of Doncaster College and North Lindsey College. DNCG is a mixed economy college and a significant regional provider of education and training across Yorkshire and the Humber, operating from two main sites in Scunthorpe and Doncaster. Provision includes further education (FE), higher education (HE), adult learning programmes, apprenticeships and programmes for students with high needs. In 2021/22, there was almost 2500 HE students (including non-recognised HE programmes) enrolled at the College, over 4000 students on programmes for young people, almost 4500 on adult learning programmes and over 2000 apprentices. The DNCG Strategic Plan 2020-23[1] identifies the ambition for DNCG against a set of core values and strategic objectives, which underpin the College's approach to maintaining a high-quality educational experience for its students. The student experience and outcomes for students are clearly linked within these strategic objectives, and supported by wider College ambitions relating to people, place and partnerships.

DNCG has developed a reputation as a high-quality educational provider of both FE and HE curricula, with the most recent Ofsted report[2] (2022) grading the College as Good overall, with four Outstanding elements. In addition, the most recent HE Quality Review visit (April 2017) for North Lindsey College[3] (pre-merger) resulted in an outcome of confidence in all areas under scrutiny, with no specified improvements identified. There has not been a HE Quality Review post-merger, however DNCG successfully registered with the Office for Students in 2018 and currently has no enhanced monitoring conditions. The College's financial position has improved post-merger, resulting in achieving 'Outstanding' financial health for the past two financial years[4].

Aligned to its strategic objectives, DNCG is part of the Lincolnshire Institute of Technology (IoT) since 2019[5], with a focus on higher level skills in engineering and digital technologies to meet local and regional needs of engineering manufacturers. The College is also a member of the South Yorkshire Institute of Technology (IoT), which aims to increase higher-level technical skills in the region through a focussed approach on localised specialist provision in the areas of engineering and manufacturing, construction, digital and healthcare science. Collaboration within these IoTs supports the College's ambitions to *"invest in local and regional priority sectors including Digital, Health, Engineering, Construction and green technologies as growth sectors"* , and to *"develop education supply in priority areas such as Nurses and Health Professionals, Automation Engineering, Construction, Digital Technologies and Higher Skills"*[1]

For HE, provision operates from two university campuses; a dedicated HE campus in Scunthorpe, University Campus North Lindsey (UCNL) and University Campus Doncaster (UCDon) which operates from within the main Doncaster College campus. Specialist facilities across DNCG supporting HE delivery include:

- separate HE campus/building in Scunthorpe plus bespoke HE facilities integrated into the main Doncaster campus;

- a bespoke business hub with innovation suites including contemporary pods and dedicated rooms;
- industry-standard specialist IT equipment and software to support creative arts and design programmes such as high-specification Apple iMacs, Wacom graphics tablets, and specialist Adobe software which simulate professional studios and other industry environments;
- state of the art ceramics workshop and studio facilities providing students studying on fine arts and crafts programmes a range of equipment to study different techniques and processes, in addition to an industry standard artisan printing facility and a professional metalworking workshop;
- new digital engineering technologies, known as Industry 4.0, is a transformation that makes it possible to gather and analyse data across machines, enabling faster, more flexible, and more efficient processes to produce higher-quality goods at reduced costs. Students at DNCG have access to purpose-built engineering laboratories to undertake Robotics, Electronics, Mechatronics and Control Systems and Industry 4.0 practical sessions. The HE Engineering laboratories comprise a Factory of the Future, Automation and Mechatronics laboratories which offer an enriching experience that encompasses digital engineering technologies with industry 4.0;
- mock hospital wards with associated specialist equipment including a nursing station, clinical practice areas, and other mock practical stations, plus emergency injuries simulation, infection control kits and resuscitation simulation kits;
- specialist science laboratories and animal collections to support animal science programmes;
- a bespoke sports laboratory at the Scunthorpe site which is specialised for exercise physiology, strength and conditioning testing, plus sport analysis software (Inplay), which is widely used in the industry plus use of the facilities at the ECO Power stadium, which is the home to several elite level football and rugby teams.

The largest curriculum areas for undergraduate provision (excluding apprenticeships) are Education and Teaching (23% of full-time (FT) students; 22% of part-time (PT) students), Business and Management (12% of FT students; 27% of PT students) and Allied Health (22% of FT students; 12% of PT students)[a]. The majority of undergraduates are mature on entry; over 75% of full-time students are female, and 56% of part-time students are female, and the vast majority of entrants do not have traditional A-level qualifications. The predominant ethnicity at DNCG is white (over 90%), with over 70% of full-time students, and over 60% of part-time students enrolling with a local address.

DNCG has programme validation partnerships with four universities: University of Hull, University of Lincoln, Sheffield Hallam University, and the University of Huddersfield. Additionally, the portfolio offers Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) programmes awarded by Pearson Education, qualifications awarded by professional bodies such as the Chartered Management Institute (CMI) or the Chartered Institute of Professional Development (CIPD). DNCG is also a member of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA). The infrastructure supporting HE at DNCG is operationally distinct from other educational provision at the College, with an established HE Academic Board overseeing all aspects of HE provision through a management structure which supports HE-specific operational and quality matters, including a separate HE Quality team and HE-only teaching staff. DNCG also engages with a range of relevant HE national and regional representative bodies such as the Mixed Economy Group (MEG) and Association of Colleges (AoC) regional group to ensure continuous updating of all current HE issues. DNCG also recently won first place for Further Education college-based HE at the Whatuni Student Choice Awards in 2019 and 2020, building on the second place award achieved in 2018. These awards were based entirely on reviews submitted independently by DNCG students, indicating the high levels of satisfaction with their overall experience.

The total number of students and apprentices enrolled on HE programmes in 2021/22 was 2391 (Table 1). The HE portfolio comprises 94 awards from Level 4 to Level 7, 20 Higher Level and Degree

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[a] Office for Students: Size and shape of provider data dashboard. Available at: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/size-and-shape-of-provision-data-dashboard/data-dashboard/

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Apprenticeships which include a prescribed HE qualification or a professional qualification as an apprenticeship element, and a small number of qualifications that are awarded by professional bodies.

Table 1. 2021/22 enrolments by curriculum area

Curriculum area	Number of enrolments for each mode of study			
	Full-time	Part-time	Apprenticeships	Total
Children's Learning and Development	242	256		
Business and Management Studies	185	11	123	**319**
Health and Social Care	266		46	
Social Science	246			
Counselling and Relationship Studies	179	56	0	**235**
Engineering	25	91	67	**183**
Sports Science and Coaching	111		0	
Education and Teacher Training	23	81	15	**119**
Creative Arts and Digital Industries	92	22	0	**114**
Construction		34	50	
Literature and History	51	11	0	**62**
Life Sciences	53			■
Computer Science	20	0	0	**20**
Total	**1496**	**584**	**311**	**2391**

Approximately half of the awards portfolio sits at Levels 4 and 5. These awards are comprised of standard vocational qualifications that have currency in the relevant employment sector, such as Higher National Certificates and Diplomas (HNCs and HNDs, respectively) in Engineering and Construction, and Foundation Degrees in Children's Education and in Health and Social Care. Approximately one third of the awards are at Level 6 and a further one-third of these are Level 6 Top-Ups offering progression to an Honours Degree from vocational Higher National and Foundation Degree qualifications. The portfolio also includes three-year Bachelors degrees in subjects where vocational qualifications are not the sector-norm (Humanities, Social Science, Sports Science). It also includes some part-time postgraduate qualifications to support progression into careers where a Level 7 qualification is essential or advantageous for career progression (e.g. Leadership and Management, Education, and Counselling).

There is a strong commitment to vocational higher level qualifications to meet local and regional economic and social inclusive growth priorities, particularly in the Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies sector and the Health, Public Services and Care sector. Ongoing portfolio developments relating to the Health, Public Services and Care sectors to meet growing student demand indicates that DNCG is well-placed to meet the increasing demand for vocational programmes at Levels 4 and 5 in these sectors. Similar developments and growth will be a key priority moving forward in relation to programmes focussed on higher level technical skills to service demand, particularly in the Health, Engineering, Manufacturing, Construction and Digital sectors. These priorities are identified in the DNCG Strategic Plan, as described above.

The new DNCG HE Strategy is being developed to differentiate the college's offer from other providers in ways that reflect an understanding of the future world of work (flexible, lifetime learning); a recognition of the need to identify and to work with key sectors and regional/local employers and their organisations; a recognition of the varied personal circumstances and needs of students; and the widening participation agenda. As articulated in the DNCG Strategic Plan 2020-23, internal progression from FE to HE is an ongoing priority and will include development of new HE provision where gaps are identified in order to maximise career prospects and educational gains within local and regional communities.

The DNCG HE Strategy will consider core aims for HE at DNCG over the next few years, which will frame the overarching DNCG HE student experience, including delivery of an outstanding academic and professional experience; development of, and investment in, a talented staff team; further

investment in resources to maximise student success and progression; further development of partnerships to benefit students, staff and the region; and to ensure long-term financial stability.

In 2017, Doncaster was one of 12 areas in England chosen as an Opportunity Area[6]. Opportunity areas were identified as areas of social mobility cold spots, with the aim to support local communities to collaborate to improve life chances of young people in the area. This work was focussed on building solid foundations for all children from primary through to employment to improve social mobility in the area, underpinned by themes of collaboration, teacher recruitment and retention and essential life skills, which were all identified as themes for improvement over the lifecycle of the project. The identification of the Doncaster region as a social mobility cold spot further highlights some of challenges faced by DNCG as a HE provider supporting students from the area to succeed in and progress from education and into the workplace and is the basis for our approach to educational gains (See Section 3.2). The recent government 'levelling-up' agenda[b] is based on creating more opportunities for people in more places, which reinforces the importance of local and regional educational providers such as DNCG to the local skills market and to improving social mobility.

The College's widening access and participation agenda for HE is clearly articulated in the current Access and Participation Plan[7], which identifies a majority of DNCG students as coming from low-participation neighbourhoods, namely POLAR4[c] and IMD[d] quintiles 1 and 2. In addition, approximately 75% of the student population is mature. The National Student Survey 2022 Overall Satisfaction with the student experience was 84% which is 10 percentage points (ppt) above the NSS21 rate of 74% and nearly 6ppt above benchmark. This result reverses a three-year trend of decline in Overall Satisfaction and suggests a very high level of positivity within the overall student body. This significant increase in overall student satisfaction results from positive interventions in response to student feedback, notably in relation to learning resources and student support (including the establishment of the ADAPT team), which are described in later sections. It is anticipated that this positive result indicates a growing satisfaction within the student body in relation to their overall academic experience at DNCG. The Graduate Outcomes statistical release for 2019/20 reported increases to numbers of students recorded as being in full-time (+40) and part-time (+15) employment, with 89% of graduates in paid employment and/or further study (83% of graduates in paid employment and 26% in further study)[e]. Graduate Outcomes by activity and domicile remain generally in line with the sector, with DNCG exceeding sector totals for Employment and Further Study (+1%) and PT employment (+5%).

Although DNCG does offer higher-level apprenticeships (less than 8% of total HE students), for the purpose of this submission, apprenticeships will not be discussed. None of the other optional courses, as defined in Paragraph 70[f] of the TEF guidance, apply to DNCG, therefore no optional courses as identified will be included.

Regarding the student submission, students were engaged in this process via regular meetings and briefing sessions to support the student body to prepare the student TEF submission. The lead student representative has been proactive in collecting and collating evidence to support their submission, and sought staff input as required to assist. Members of the Student Engagement and Experience team collaborated with the lead student representative to ensure the student body was supported in terms of representation of information and evidence within the student submission. Some evidence in the student submission has been referenced within this main provider submission to support the evidence base. Students also had the opportunity to view drafts of the main provider submission through the Student Representative committee structure.

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[b] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom
[c] Participation of Local Areas
[d] Index of Multiple Deprivation
[e] 39% response rate for DNCG, compared to national response rate of 52%
[f] Regulatory advice 22. Guidance on the Teaching Excellence Framework 2023. OfS 2022.60. Publication date 7 October 2022.

2. Student experience

2.1 Academic experience and assessment

Outstanding teaching, learning and assessment practices are embedded throughout all programmes, and staff are highly experienced in collaborating with a range of validating partners to deliver high-quality programmes. This experience of working with several awarding institutions has supported the development of HE at DNCG, providing continuous opportunities for interactions with members of academic communities from different institutions to share best practice and operate as critical friends. This is coupled with effective employer interactions to design fit-for-purpose programmes which are recognised and endorsed by employers, as described further on within this section.

Effectiveness of teaching, learning and assessment is further evidenced by the overarching high-quality measures for full-time student experience based on the NSS questions relating to teaching, assessment and feedback, and academic support. The NSS measure for *Teaching on my course* indicates outcomes which are materially in line with benchmark for both full-time and part-time cohorts (0.5ppt[g] and -1.9ppt, respectively). The most recent NSS data records a 6.7ppt increase in satisfaction for *Teaching on my course* for full-time students following comparative scores that were slightly below benchmark in NSS21, which was the NSS year most impacted by the pandemic (as were NSS20 scores). Overall (aggregate) satisfaction with *Teaching on my course* on full-time courses is now moving toward the pre-pandemic satisfaction score and remains indicative of a high-quality experience.

The split indicators for *Teaching on my course* for full-time students are predominantly in line with benchmark, however two exceptions are within Business and Management, and Social Science cohorts, both of which recorded lower than benchmark overall aggregate scores for *Teaching on my course.* Within the Business and Management subject area, the unplanned move to online learning at the start of the first lockdown during the Covid pandemic impacted on overall student satisfaction scores due to the unfamiliarity of the new delivery method[8]. The pandemic-imposed use of a new digital platform (Microsoft Teams) to ensure continuity of the learning experience, whilst necessary, was a source of dissatisfaction to many students, as the 'normal' teaching experience had been so different (predominantly face-to-face). Sufficient access to home IT equipment, including reliable internet connectivity was challenging for many students, exacerbated by the challenges experienced by many mature students in balancing home and work commitments during a national lockdown with study. Actions taken to mitigate this included the provision of loaned laptops and purchase of wi-fi dongles. Students were also able to access the Student Opportunity Fund for support with financial hardship. It has now been widely acknowledged that many students simply could not continue learning in the same way with these imposed restrictions[9]. The Student Covid Insights Survey (SCIS) reported that during Autumn 2020, 29% of higher education students in England reported dissatisfaction with their learning experience[10], and in November 2020 more than 50% of students also reported a decline in mental health and wellbeing due to the pandemic, which could impact on overall perception of learning at that point in time.

Another contributor to the overall aggregated metric for *Teaching on my course* was lower than expected satisfaction scores for Health and Social Care, which may be partly attributable to changes in staffing throughout the lockdown period which contributed to poor perception of teaching in that particular area. The staffing situation within this curriculum area has since stabilised and it is worth noting that in 2022 Health and Social recorded 98% satisfaction with *Teaching on my course*.

A notable feature is the very high level of satisfaction for *Teaching on my course* reported for first degree courses which is materially above benchmark (+2.7ppt) and exceptionally high levels of satisfaction for Creative Arts and Design (+11.9ppt) and Social Science (+7.7ppt) programmes, both indicating outstanding quality. Although some of the data for part-time courses are suppressed due to low denominators, the majority of available split indicators are in line with benchmark, indicating overall very high-quality *Teaching on my course* for part-time students.

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[g] Percentage points

Staff have reacted to pandemic-related teaching challenges by adapting practice to support students learning needs beyond the lockdown periods. Although face-to-face learning has now largely returned, some practices have been adopted into post-pandemic programme delivery to support the diversity of students at DNCG. With due regard for the Office for Students expectations on blended learning[11], some innovative teaching practices to support students' learning have been embedded across all areas of curriculum including the following examples:

- Children's Learning and Development and Science programmes explored 'flexible by design' modules which was a response to some of the pressures relating to learning during the pandemic. The main driver for this was in response to the different needs of DNCG students during the pandemic to allow continuity of study at a time and place flexible within the constraints of home and work pressures. This approach has now been adopted into the programmes post-pandemic to further support student choice in terms of how and when they undertake their learning;
- Criminal Justice and English programmes have adopted a blended approach to teaching practices, with synchronous recorded online lectures and face to face seminars. Students, particularly those with additional learning support needs, have appreciated the ability to revisit lectures for revision purposes and students with additional learning needs have found this facility beneficial as they can note take at their own pace;
- Lightcast exotic animal dissections for science students are recorded and made available for students to review and explore at their own pace, and includes and interactive questions board facilitating flexible interactions;
- For distance-learning students, the majority of sessions were pre-recorded with flexible access according to students' lifestyle, however now there is a five-weekly rotation of live seminars and discussion which allows for better interaction within an established learning community, whilst maintaining the flexibility required for successful distance learning;
- Virtual robotics learning laboratory was established in engineering which allowed students to operate robots from home in their own time, which was particularly useful for part-time students. This practice is now established within these programmes allowing students to access this facility to supplement their face-to-face learning.

Work-related activities are certificated and embedded within programmes to further develop students' professional practice and employability portfolio. Such curriculum enhancements supports student attainment and progression by identifying and incorporating skills and competencies training which gives DNCG students a competitive edge when entering the workplace, also impacting on academic and personal confidence (as further explored in Section 3.2 Educational Gains). Examples include:

- Children's Learning and Development programmes benefit from integrated certificated courses such as Paediatric First Aid and Test Develop, plus students on these programmes are required to build their CPD portfolio by completing a range of online courses to further their training e.g. Safeguarding. Whilst validated modules have been developed to incorporate some of these key themes, the opportunity to build an individualised portfolio enhances students credibility with potential employers and allows them to easily demonstrate the additional education gains made during their academic journey;
- BA Early Childhood Studies integrates a forest school qualification within the programme;
- BA Early Childhood/ FdA Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Early Years students develop a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) portfolio within their programme which contributes to their career progression via identification and completion of the skills and competencies required in a SENCO role;
- Animal Science students have the opportunity to undertake a Level 2 Certificate in Technical Competence in Dog Walking, which is a requirement to establish a business in this area and offers clear support for career development.

Additionally, the *Assessment and Feedback* measure supports a very high-quality experience for full-time students, with an indicator value of 83 (2.5ppt above benchmark), reflecting the experiences of the majority of students at DNCG. The indicator for part-time provision, although representative of a smaller percentage of students, is an area of ongoing development however (6.9ppt below

benchmark). The split indicators for full-time students for *Assessment and Feedback* are predominantly in line with benchmark with some that are materially above benchmark. A notable feature is the very high level of satisfaction reported for first degree courses for *Assessment and Feedback* which is materially above benchmark (+5.1ppt) and indicates outstanding quality practice for this level of study. There are also exceptionally high levels of satisfaction for this measure in five subject areas where satisfaction with assessment and feedback is materially above benchmark and indicates widespread outstanding quality practice, notably: Creative Arts and Design (+9.9ppt); English Studies (+5.0ppt); Law (+7.9ppt); Social Science (+12.3ppt) and Biosciences (+5.1ppt).

There are many examples of innovative use of assessment at DNCG, particularly involving external stakeholders and practitioners which supports the very high quality student experience by challenging them with real-life and industry-focussed scenarios. DNCG has strong relationships with a range of external stakeholders including employers, industry representatives and practitioners. These relationships support a wide range of innovative assessment methods used across programmes at DNCG, which have been developed to motivate students to achieve and excel in their studies and career choices. Real-world scenarios, portfolio development, reflective writing, research presentations, observational and practical scenarios are integrated into programmes as appropriate, developing students for their chosen career pathways. Guest speakers are used throughout all programmes to enrich the student experience. One outstanding example of innovation in assessment is in the Creative Arts and Design programmes where students have the opportunity to attend guest lectures by a range of respected industry professionals, who also collaborate with teaching staff by designing assessment briefs and providing feedback from an employer's perspective. This real-world input creates a supportive professional environment whereby students are assessed with clear links to career pathways and industry topics. It also challenges students professional and personal development by exposing them to non-familiar situations.

Further evidence of high-quality assessment and feedback practices is indicated by the external examiner reports from academic year 2020-21 which provide feedback of excellent practice in terms of teaching, learning and assessment practices. For example, the external examiner for English reported:

> *"I am impressed by the variety of assessment methods with which the students can demonstrate their knowledge and understanding and develop very important, transferable skills. I particularly like the use of digital portfolios, artefacts, academic posters, and assessed seminars. I also like the idea of a videographic essay – this type of assessment at level 5 produced some of the best examples of very strong assignments"[12]*

Similarly, the external examiner for the BA Contemporary Relational Counselling/BSc (Top-up) Counselling Solutions commended assessment practice in their recent report, specifically with regards to career development:

> *"A range of appropriate assessment strategies are employed to test student learning and there is a good mix of testing for knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which are all relevant to the practice of counselling"* [13]

Innovative assessment practice for Business and Management students is demonstrated through the annual Business and Management Exhibition held at the end of the academic year, attended by local employers and senior managers. Student assessment occurs alongside feedback from industry representatives and professionals, facilitating students' networking and presentation skills. In addition to providing students an opportunity to professionally network with employers and showcasing their work, it further adds to the relationships between employers and DNCG. Digital literacy is developed via an embedded assessment method on the FdA Management programme, whereby students create a website using Google Sites, allowing students to gain experience as genuine content creators and develop their creative skills. The Marketing module on this programme sees students using Canva (Infographic app) and Padlet (digital notice board) as part of the assessment strategy, and final year students have the opportunity to create avatars to deliver assessed presentations in the leadership module.

Students on the FdA Children's Learning and Development programme benefit from delivering a science activity at the Children's University Science Fair as part of their assessment. This

assessment requires students to plan, risk assess, differentiate and deliver an activity, which effectively mirrors the real-life situation of classroom teaching and engagement with children. This assessment assesses essential skills required for employment and enables students to showcase their practical skills and creativity before writing an academic reflection of their experience. Student feedback recorded acknowledgement from the students on the effectiveness and application of this activity and how it contributes to development of vital skills needed in the education sector. Having such a practical assessment builds student confidence and self-esteem, with staff recognition of their skills in practice, rather than full focus on academic skills and theoretical understanding.   The Children's Learning and Development employability assessment includes preparation for the future such as CV preparation and mock interview situations which are held off-site with unfamiliar interviewers, industry stakeholders, to recreate a real-life situation. Students on the BA Children's Learning and Development undertake a module on Innovation and Change, whereby they carry out an action research project by implementing a change in a setting and evaluating it as part of the assessment.

Guided workplace projects provided students on the FdA Management programme opportunities to produce original research and apply their learning to real world situations, with some genuine creativity and innovation illustrated through student projects. For example, one student project investigated an operation's project to save £1million in down time in industry; another explored methods to increase the uptake of cervical smears on the NHS; and the use of digital communication during the government lockdowns also formed the basis of another project.

Student on the BA Early Childhood Studies top up produce a video blog (Vlog) as part of their innovative assessment which enable them to reflect on the development of personal and professional skills during their time on programme. Students have used this innovative assessment method as part of their submissions for job applications. This assessment develops students' confidence and professional language skills. FdSc Health and Social Care students showcased their self-developed health promotion tools via a 'Health Matters' symposium as part of their assessment, which was attended by Public Health England alongside internal stakeholders. Feedback from Public Health England[14] was excellent and included:

> "There was a great variety of tools demonstrated by the students and they spoke with a true sense of passion and belief in their chosen subjects. It was evident that the students had completed extensive research in their field and demonstrated a true depth of knowledge for their topic and their target audience. There were some truly inspiring students and I can see the future health and social care champions in them, improving and protecting the health for our current and future generations. I wish them all a successful future."

> "I was very impressed with the health promotion tools that had been developed by the students. It was a great opportunity to speak to the students and discuss the concept behind why they chose this specific health topic and the evidence base for creating the type of Health promotional tool for their topic area. The quality of the standard of the toolkits displayed was of high standard and with my Public Health hat on I felt that each of the posters could be utilised by our Public Team for our Health campaigns. There were a wide range of innovative ideas in reaching specific target audience. Each student I spoke to had demonstrated in-depth knowledge around their specific health topic. Some very powerful personal stories shared on the reasoning for choosing their health topic area and the importance of addressing the inequalities and how their toolkit could reach some of those marginalised groups. I would be keen to attend future events like these. There will be some great partnership opportunities we can develop… …there may be an opportunity for the students to be involved in a face-to-face engagement around the campaigns with the support of the Public Health Leads."

A podcast assessment is used on the FdA Social Science programme whereby students provide a verbal exposition and critical evaluation of social theory. Students are encouraged to be creative with this assessment and a range of visual aids may be used to further develop students' transferable digital and technological skills.

Sport assessment includes undertaking professional consultations with athletes, and in conducting performance analysis using specialist software widely used in industry. These assessments allow students to gain real-life experience and skills supporting them with future employment, facilitating 'work-readiness' by familiarisation with tools and approaches used in the workplace. Sport students at DNCG delivered sport massage to the Samoan international rugby league team and the Doncaster rugby league team, and other students work with Scunthorpe United Football club to develop the youth team's strength and conditioning, nutrition and psychology understanding. Children's Learning and Development Employability assessment includes preparation for the future such as CV preparation and mock interview situations which are held off-site with unfamiliar interviewers, industry stakeholders, to recreate a real-life situation. Students collate an e-portfolio to evidence continuing professional development throughout the course, e.g. paediatric first aid level 2. Curriculum enhancements throughout the programme are designed to have currency in the workplace. Similarly, the BA Children's Learning and Development students undertake a module on Innovation and Change, whereby they carry out an action research project, implement a change in a setting and evaluate it in their assessment. Science students have to suggest change within CPD module where they

Furthermore, the overall student academic experience can be enhanced by a range of methods at DNCG through initiatives and support mechanisms such as the **Employability Bursary Scheme (EBS)** and the **Scholarly Intern Programme (SchIP).** The Employability Bursary Scheme continues to encourage students to take a proactive approach towards their own professional and personal development. Eligible students apply for funding to support activities, additional courses or resources to support their own employability and challenges them to identify opportunities and take ownership of their learning by requiring applicants to make explicit links between planned activities and programme objectives. Some recent examples of students benefitting from the EBS include:

- Children's Learning and Development students submitted a group application for combined funding which enabled access to specialised training. Students were able to organise a conference with international speakers and workshops which provided opportunities to gain wider experiences and develop their subject knowledge. This enhanced the development of a community of practice and normalised attending conferences, supporting continued lifelong learning;
- A   Children, Learning and Development student used their bursary to fund a Makaton course, which as a certificated qualification supported their employability within the sector;
- Individual Sport, Exercise and Coaching students completed an FA Football Coaches programme, first aid training and a Level 3 Education course, assisting the student to refine their approach to coaching in the community and delivering effective sessions their clients;
- In 2021/22 FdA Mental Health and Wellbeing students submitted and had approved a group application for Mind to deliver Mental Health First Aid training. One student reported "This was a fabulous opportunity to come together as a group, I really enjoyed the practical element of this course and will utilise some of the skills I have learned as I move forward"[15]

The Scholarly Internship Programme (SchIP) provides opportunities for students to engage with academic staff in collaborative research activity. The aim of the SchIP initiative is to develop HE at DNCG with a commitment to the creation of collaborative learning communities. The objectives of the programme are to: support and develop the scholarly interests and capabilities of educators and learners; develop for learners and educators research project management skills; enhance funding application writing skills and provide for learners an authentic research experience which will enhance their employability and potentially raise their career aspirations. A recent addition to the objectives of the programme is to engage local communities and local businesses in research projects to further enhance the community and employer engagement. SchIP invites members of the DNCG learning community to identify a research question which can be explored in collaboration with educators and learners. Members of staff may bid for a scholarly-internship post to join the research team and become actively involved in the running of the project. To support the

development of a community of practice and assess project viability applications will be peer reviewed by colleagues across DNCG and developmental feedback offered. In some instances, external guidance from discipline experts will be sought. Collaborative bids deriving from the wider DNCG community (employers, alumni, community groups) or involving educators and learners are especially encouraged. Engagement with the SchIP programme fosters increased engagement with research led/informed teaching which also similarly increases student's research and academic writing abilities, thus promoting self-learning and academic confidence.

Table 2: Number of publications from each School across DNCG between 2017-2022 and number of research active colleagues.

	Engineering, Science & Technology	Health & Wellbeing	Business & Social Science	Education & Arts
No. of research active staff	11			
No. of publications	17		19	

Employers are at the forefront of programme design and contribute with each aspect of programme design with several examples of outstanding practice embedded within programme development. The blueprint for this was developed with the BA Leadership and Management in Integrated Services fast track Chartered Managers Degree Apprenticeship (CMDA) during 2017-2020. Stakeholders from the National Health Service (NHS) and Community Practitioner Alliance Healthcare were part of the stakeholder group. There was an initial scoping exercise across Doncaster and the surrounding region, which involved a number of sectors- education, health and social care- to determine the market demand. Stakeholders were invited to contribute at each stage of the process including programme development, defining graduate outcomes and competencies, and constructing the learning, teaching and assessment strategies. The blueprint demonstrates best practice and innovation in partnership working[16].and has been applied to programme development in other areas such as the FdA Supporting Children and Young People's Mental Health, and the development of the Kids Planet programmes.

The contribution of employers to the development of course content is fundamental to enhancing the student experience at DNCG. This is facilitated by regular employer briefings, networking and advisory groups and other activities to engage with a range of employers on programme design, including module development and assessment strategies. For Children's Learning and Development programmes, employers have contributed to programme development by identifying expectations relating to expected graduate outcomes, which have been embedded within course content to ensure employability is at the forefront of programme design. Employers have also offered guidance on assessment strategies which has resulted in programmes that are fit for purpose for employees of the future. An excellent example is the collaboration between Kids Planet and DNCG. Kids Planet is a nationally-recognised 'super nursery' chain who have actively collaborated with DNCG to develop a now established partnership, which has mutually benefitted both parties by integrating employers needs into DNCG programmes. Another example of mutual collaborative partnership is with the NEXUS multi-academy trust, a specialist educational provider, who has contributed to programme design by providing specialist input and supporting innovative practice. DNCG staff members have been invited to deliver some staff CPD[h] at Nexus to contribute to the staff development, which is an excellent opportunity for DNCG staff to exchange knowledge and keep current. Nurturing such relationships with key employers is hugely important in continuing to enhance the ongoing student academic experience.

Specialist employers in the sector have contributed to improvements on other programmes e.g. our collaboration with Heatherwood Special School informs the development of the SEND portfolio from Levels 4-7 through liaison with staff and contributions to programme development. Further evidence is provided from employers through meetings of stakeholders and analysis of reports and regional

[h] Continuing Professional Development

documents for the development of Environmental Science[17]. The Educational Psychology Service also provided support in the development of the suite of counselling programmes[18].

The External Examiners reports 2021/22 have highlighted four key strengths and areas of good practice emerge across the portfolio in this review:

- the variety of assessment methods within the assessment strategy of many programmes and across the portfolio, including live project briefs;
- the high standard of feedback on assessed work, specifically the clarity, relevance and usefulness of the feedback;
- the embedding of employability considerations and the application of theory into practice in the content and assessment in programmes;
- the development of clear and consistent grading rubrics to accompany feedback on assessed work.

Employers are complementary about student's readiness for work and the professional skills they have developed whilst on programme[19]. Programmes are designed to develop graduate skills and competencies ensuring students have transferable skills that lead to their successful employment. Some programme specifications include a diagrammatic, linking aspects of the programme to graduate outcomes, this making it transparent for the students. This was identified as good practice by the validating partner. Many programmes have placement elements which are integral to the programme design. These are evidenced by observations of practice which record the students' development of professional skills[10]. Feedback and final year reports provide further evidence the quality of graduate skills. Employers have supported the assessment of students in several ways and have provided evaluative comments. This provides students with an opportunity to present their work to external stakeholders, which is meaningful for students and enables them to develop their confidence in presenting to an unknown audience. This is witnessed through presentation to an external panel or as part of a conference symposium. Employer feedback is encouraging and notes the quality of student submissions and their skills which has made a direct impact on their work[20].

Some feedback from external examiners on how continuous engagement with employers has contributed to an outstanding student experience is evident in a range of external examiners reports:

"Reflection on practice is a core element of delivery and assessment and a strength of how relevant this degree is to those already employed in the early childhood education sector. […] Assessments are also encouraging IT skills, presenting skills, all valid to the early childhood education workforce and student's continued professional development." [21]

"The professional training especially is a notable strength, with students gaining hands-on experience with excellent tutors, and technical expertise." [22]

"The course provides a diverse range of professional practice and experiences related to craft and fine art, this includes live briefs and working with external stake holders and local opportunities."[23]

An outstanding example of innovative practice with clear outcomes for student progression is evidenced through the establishment of the Doncaster Forest School at the college, a result of a successful bid for £200k of funding to roll out the Doncaster Forest School initiative[24] as an intervention programme to disadvantaged children in Doncaster. This provided an opportunity for some students to undertake a Level 3 Forest School qualification which allowed them to gain paid employment through the college, working alongside staff on interventions in schools in the region. One DNCG graduate who participated in this opportunity now runs her own Forest School business at Doncaster Wildings.

Further opportunities to enhance the student academic experience included:

- Involvement of practitioners in teaching and learning is evident in the FdA Children's Learning and Development where students have had guest lectures from the local authority on

Safeguarding and Child Protection. This has enabled students to hear about current practice in a local context. In addition, visits from Health Visitors and Social Workers have supported the development of knowledge of BA Early Childhood Studies students, some of whom follow a progression route into further study at Masters Level and on to employment in the social care sector. A wide range of professionals enhance the curriculum offer through guest lectures and provide specialist knowledge e.g. BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies students have a Speech and Language Therapist share their knowledge with them, which supports their understanding of children's developing language and the barriers that some children face in developing their communication skills;

- An excellent example of cross-subject enhancement activity was the Science Symposium which was an event to raise awareness of emerging issues in animal welfare and science. This event was well-attended by the public and enabled students to develop key employability skills including communication and public speaking. Feedback gathered from students participating in the event highlighted that student's confidence was developed and a sense of empowerment was yielded by raising awareness of issues important to them;

- Students attended oversea trips to Ghana where they participated in teaching children in a deprived rural school and engaged in project work with schools;

- Children's Learning and Development students visited Montessori settings in Italy to observe practices;

- Strength in Diversity Interfaith group, which delivers a series of talks and events, including community events. For Interfaith week for the past two years, an Interfaith exhibition was held. Additionally, students organised a 'Faith at the End of Life' event which was popular with students studying health and counselling modules as this directly impacted on their professional practice in developing confidence to support patients/clients of different faiths;

- Students also have opportunity to attend conferences organised by staff for example the 'Cultural Competence and Dangerous Diversity' Conference, which included speakers such as karma Nirvana, representatives from the local authorities, and individuals relating their lived experiences (topics such as disability, transgender, life as a refugee and racism in the NHS). Other conferences to enhance the student educational experience included talks from internationally acclaimed researchers, who spoke about his work with disadvantaged communities and parental involvement; and who spoke about her research on Communication Friendly Spaces;

- Animal science students attended online conferences in breeding and genetics, biotechnology, animal behaviour, animal nutrition, animal health and ecology.

2.2 Resources, support and student engagement

DNCG holds a generous staff development budget and staff have used this to gain higher level qualifications (e.g. Masters and Level 7 Academic Professional)[25] which enables them to enhance their academic practice as well as develop current knowledge at the forefront of their subject. At DNCG this is facilitated through the formal appraisal policy known as the Professional Development Review (PDR) process, and provides a means to identify and apply for any additional staff development, including training or wider scholarship activities. Where a need or opportunity is identified through the PDR process, staff can complete an application[26] for staff development and must clearly identify the anticipated impact for the individual, the college and the students. This ensures that student experience is included in consideration of any college-supported activity.

Supported overseas travel is included in this support, and there are many examples of how this activity has enhanced staff knowledge and provided international perspectives on a range of approaches which are then used to inform the curriculum and support enhancements to practice. Students have accompanied staff on overseas travel (Italy, Denmark, Ghana) and this has broadened their horizons and provided opportunities to develop their own practice[27]. Delegates have included employers and those from industry and this has provided networking opportunities for staff and students and developed a community of practice[28]. A notable impact resulting from the Early Years' trip to Reggio Emilia is demonstrated by the publication produced by the Best Practice Network[29] which highlights the need for innovative thinking beyond the typical blueprint of early years

education. This resulted in the establishment of a community of practice which enhanced student professional status and enabled access to a broad range of employability opportunities, demonstrating a clear impact on the student educational experience.

Short courses are accessed to ensure staff have the necessary qualifications to delivery curriculum enhancements and stay current in their practice, this is particularly relevant to nursing and health and social care, sport and education[30]. Staff also access conferences, seminars and internal applications provide evidence of this, which are disseminated to wider programme teams to enable them to update their knowledge and share this with their students[31]. This has a direct impact on the curriculum by providing students with opportunities to learn about sector developments and current research, and ensures curriculum is at the 'cutting-edge' of knowledge and practice.

Alongside this, staff can apply for staff development funding for additional qualifications such as Masters programmes, teacher education programmes and to present at conferences nationally and internationally. Between 2018/19 and 2020/21, 57 staff were supported by DNCG to undertake a course for professional development, including 16 staff members receiving support to undertake a Masters qualification and several to complete teacher training. Staff members engaging in research or scholarly activity are expected to disseminate their outputs via conference presentations, publications and/or internal training events.

DNCG is a research active institution and additionally supports staff and students to undertake scholarly activity in collaboration with students to enhance the overall learning environment and experience. Research is a cornerstone of the HE ethos across DNCG and staff are actively encouraged to further their academic research interests to ensure a diverse, relevant, and industry-standard learning experience for all students. This has resulted in a broad range of publications from academics across all Schools at DNCG, including those co-authored by students, demonstrating direct impact on the student experience. Staff-student collaboration in research activity is well-established at the college, and is now fully established as an enhancement activity.

In 2015, the Research Internship programme (predecessor to SchIP) was piloted which enabled academics to formulate a research proposal and recruit HE students to work collaboratively on projects within specific fields of study. Following this, in 2016, the SchIP[32] was formally disseminated at the College the programme was trialled and tested as part of the Association of Colleges Scholarship Project and in response to learner and educator feedback, the programme continues to evolve. DNCG has consistently demonstrated commitment to scholarship which is demonstrated through the inclusion of SchIP within the deliberative structure across HE enabling research to take place. Academics undertaking SchIP projects are given remission to support and nurture research opportunities across the group. Since 2017/18, there has been 26 approved SchIP projects which have all demonstrated clear collaboration between academic staff and students.

DNCG staff have also contributed to the Association of Colleges (AoC) College HE Scholarship Framework, as described in Section 2, with several publications. Notably, in 2019, a member of the Biochemistry team published a think piece as part of the AoC Scholarship Framework looking at the function and challenges of delivering biochemistry to widening-participation students in a college-based HE context[33]. This publication was a collaborative research article involving students and resulted in the project receiving a grant from the AoC to enable further development of the key principles. The research undertaken within this area positively impacts students by broadening horizons and raising aspiration, as evidenced by a further case study which documented the clear positive impact this research had on students at DNCG alongside the broader impacts in college-based HE[34]. In 2021, another SchIP project was successfully published in the highly prestigious British Medical Journal[35], which investigated the capabilities of social media to harness vaccine confidence and uptake. The outputs of the research informed a broad range of teaching and learning materials looking at the capabilities of questionnaires and was embedded into dissertation modules across the group. During the 2022 academic year, another staff-student collaborative research piece was published in The Times Higher Education[36] and received accolades from the sector for identifying and calling for further policy to support this 'overlooked group' of students. This research not only impacted internal delivery of teaching, but impacted the sector to raise awareness of the

issues associated with being a carer studying within HE. Academics within the English team frequently present at conferences on subject-specific pieces alongside educational themes. In 2018, the English team presented at the AoC Research and Scholarship Conference a piece titled 'Bye Bye Blackboard' looking at the transition to new VLEs and the impact this has on assessment strategies when developing new curricula[37].

Staff continue to share their knowledge through a number of ways and have engaged in 'live' webinars which provide informative sessions which reach wider audiences due to their accessibility[38]. Teaching staff ensure they attend sector networks as this provides up to date information on sector advancement and change which they are able to feedback to students[39]. In addition, the ASPIRE scheme is a college-wide recognition scheme voted for by peers and directly relate to how the staff member demonstrates excellence in teaching or support mechanisms that promote excellence in teaching. Receiving an award may result in increased staff motivation to continue to strive for excellence and also creates a strong sense of value within an academic learning community which can have positive impacts on teaching excellence.

DNCG aims to provide a supportive, inclusive and accessible learning and teaching environment for all students, which is articulated through the DNCG HE Strategy *".. facilitate the best possible student experience, developing students inside and outside the classroom"*. Flexible learning is further facilitated by the offer of evening and part-time delivery options for some courses to cater for student's life demands. This is particularly true for mature students which make up the majority of DNCG's student population.

High levels of pastoral and academic support are provided by academic tutor meetings, where academic progress is discussed and managed, and by an open-door policy whereby students can raise any immediate concerns in a timely manner with staff members. Academic tutorials are offered in most modules, including additional examination preparation and assignment preparation. Small group learning supports student learning and interaction and helps to develop academic confidence in DNCG's students. In addition, high levels of student support are offered via effective course leadership, HE registry and administration, learning support, student services and the student engagement teams. Each programme is assigned a Programme Leader, who is responsible for the management of the curriculum for that particular course, or suite of courses, including oversight of teaching, learning and assessment practices. Programme Leaders are responsible for ensuring their courses operate in accordance with the College's (and validating universities) policies and practices. Programme leaders also lead on curriculum developments in their areas of management, including proposals for new programmes, revalidations and work placement support. Programme leaders complete programme monitoring reports for their areas under the guidance of the Heads of School, and are responsible for working collaboratively to implement action plans arising from programme monitoring.

The NSS measure for *Academic Support* shows an improving picture with a 7.8ppt aggregate increase in for full-time courses, which is in line with benchmark and indicates high-quality student experience for *Academic Support*. This is following a materially below benchmark performance in the pandemic-affected NSS21 which was disruptive overall for students as described through this submission. The split indictors for *Academic Support* reports very high level of satisfaction for Asian (+4.6 ppt above benchmark) and Mixed (+4.8 ppt above benchmark) ethnic populations which indicates outstanding quality academic support for these under-represented student groups. There are also exceptionally high levels of satisfaction on our Social Science (+9.8 ppt above benchmark) and English Studies (+4.1ppt above benchmark) courses which indicates outstanding quality academic support. Although there are aggregated pockets of low satisfaction with *Academic Support,* namely Computing and Health and Social Care cohorts, the majority of students experience a high quality experience for academic support.

A recent initiative to strengthen student outcomes has been the development of the ADAPT (Academic Development and Pastoral Team) to provide a defined point of contact for student support. The rebranding of the support team to ADAPT ensured the successes already established regarding student engagement with support and DSA needs were implemented from a one team

perspective to all Higher Education students across both campuses and the equality of support provision was in place to meet individual needs. The consolidation of support into the ADAPT team has also ensured the growing number of students making disclosures relating to support needs are responded to in a timely and effective manner. There is further support available from a dedicated pastoral support role within the ADAPT team, which also offers mental health support. Additionally, allocated members of ADAPT to each School area ensured that familiarity, communication and individualised support for identified programmes was effective. ADAPT sessions are recorded and made available to all students to ensure continuity of the available support mechanisms.

Table 3 provides information on the growing number of sessions delivered by the ADAPT support team in response to a commitment to strengthen students outcomes by supporting students in both academic and pastoral matters.

Table 3. Number of individuals supported by the ADAPT team, plus number of sessions delivered over the past three academic years

	2019/20	**2020/21**	**2021/22**
Number of Students	305	563	466
Academic Sessions	816	1860	1335
Pastoral Sessions	655	277	401
Total Sessions	**1471**	**2137**	**1736**

To meet the increasing demand for mental health support, an additional Pastoral Officer was introduced in 2021/22 academic year to focus on dedicated support with regards to students' mental health needs. The Student Society also developed a Teams channel called 'Lockdown Lift-me-ups' in response to student feedback about the general low mood relating to the pandemic and lockdown restrictions, which offered daily interactions quizzes, brain-teasers and other fun activities for the whole learning community (staff and students).

There are several ways the Learning Resources Centre (LRC) supports students and the staff. An induction programme is available throughout the academic year for groups or individuals to access which includes:
- Creating passwords and Multi Factor Authentication
- Online access to our e-Resources via Libguides
- Canvas
- How to use the Library
- Office 365
- Essential Digital Skills

In response to the pandemic and lockdown, the LRC also increased reservation parameters and offered a click and collect service, with students informed by regular email communication to ensure clarity of process. created Lib Guides for students using a platform similar to a VLE to make it easier for students to find their resources. The LRC have continued with both of these services post-pandemic service as it proved valuable to support students learning. In addition, the purchase of more electronic versions of core/indicative titles enabled students to continue study at home during lockdown, with continued support to facilitate access and use. Further academic support provided by the LRC is detailed in the following sections.

The current aggregated NSS indicator for *Learning resources* is below benchmark (-7.5ppt) for full-time students, some of which can be attributed to the impact of the pandemic, as shown by slightly lower results for NSS20 and NSS21. There are several interacting factors which are likely to have impacted on a poor score for *Learning resources* over the past four years, notably impacts of the merger and its associated reallocation of some resources (2017-2019), plus the pandemic causing disruption to the 'normal' learning experience (2020-2021 specifically). The merger saw some physical resource restructuring, which impacted on the wider learning resources facilities at both sites. Prior to the merger, Doncaster College students benefitted from a HE-specific campus at High

Melton, which changed to be integrated into the main Doncaster College site post-merger. Anecdotal evidence suggests high levels of student dissatisfaction from Doncaster-based students during this period due to the move, with an underlying perception of 'less resources' (e.g. shared library with FE students, and other shared facilities). This had the most impact in the couple of years post-merger (2018-2020), as students settled into the new arrangements. Similarly, there was a change in HE facilities at North Lindsey College post-merger, with the move to a bespoke HE campus, separate from the FE campus. Whilst this represented an overall positive move to create a bespoke HE campus, there was an initial perception of 'reduced facilities' at the time (e.g. a smaller library, albeit a bespoke HE library) which caused some dissatisfaction until the move was complete and normal service resumed. NSS22 indicates increasing satisfaction with Learning resources with an 11% rise compared to NSS21.

On investigating the NSS data relating to Learning Resources, there are specific curriculum areas scoring significantly lower than others which will therefore impact the aggregate score. For example, Law (Criminal Justice programmes) recorded very poor NSS21 score for Learning Resources (25%) compared to the same question in NSS22 (67%), and we can see from the NSS data that much of the dissatisfaction was related to IT resources and facilities (19%/57% in NSS21 and NSS22, respectively). In particular, the move to purchase more e-books for this particular programme to facilitate online learning during the pandemic, resulted in some access and technological issues for some students. In response, in conjunction with the LRC team, support sessions were developed to offer training on the new e-book platform. The LRC continuously offer support to students and staff relating to learning resources. Bookable Library Information Skills sessions that offer the following tailored support for DNCG students: referencing (covering all validating university partners regulations), research and resources (including the use of specific databases), presentation skills, creating academic posters, critical writing/analysis, literature reviews and case studies/formulation and Excel training. There is also the offer of 1-1 support which is available and bookable via the LRC staff. The LRC also supports a service where students can recommend books for purchase, which builds on student ability to develop their own learning. Resources specific t curriculum, including niche areas and dissertation topics can be requested. Between September-December in 2022, over 30 new books were purchased in response to student requests. In turn, this service improves student communication with staff to support individual learning.

On further investigation, there were further issues relating to internet stability and password issues that have disrupted students from accessing online materials and/or the virtual learning environment (VLE). In addition, the college suffered from a cyber-attack in July 2020 which resulted in disruption for all students at the start of the 2020/21 academic year due to the necessity of reimaging all desktop computers at the Doncaster site, plus the rebuilding and re-establishment of hundreds of services and applications. The FdA Criminal Justice is delivered only at Doncaster site which may explain some of this localised dissatisfaction. Other factors contributing to the significant decrease in student satisfaction for consideration may also include a change of delivery structure (semester to trimester) in 2020/21 and the rapid adjustment to online learning as described above.

Since 2020, the college has taken the following measures via its IT, facilities and wider teams to improve the wider student experience in relation to resources:

- Entire replacement of the DNCG cyber security protection;
- Migration of two Microsoft tenancies into one to make access to O365 seamless across the DNCG to improve the experience of staff and students[i];
- major investment in a new core infrastructure to improve wifi to create a more stable and reliable platform for the delivery of cloud based services for students and staff;
- Installation of a new firewall and a 2nd JANET link to ensure resilience of online services and improved connectivity;
- Provision of approx. 1700 additional staff and student laptops and video conferencing equipment to support blended learning and teaching and mobile working;
- Provision of additional software to support online teaching, learning and assessment, including Nearpod, Inplay and additional CANVAS licences;

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[i] Funded by Sheffield City Region

- HE CADI upgrades included over 30 IMacs for HE Illustration and Concept Art and HE Graphic Design, plus several Macbook Pros for HE staff;
- A service to provide laptops to students awaiting their DSA benefit was been set up. A total of 30 HE students were provided with laptops either because of hardship or awaiting their DSA;
- Installation of a new industry-standard digital suite and server room to support the creative and digital industries students based[40]

The split indicators for FT student groups and courses are predominantly materially below benchmark. A notable feature is the high level of satisfaction for *Learning resources* reported by our Biosciences (+3.2ppt compared to benchmark) and Allied Health (+4.8ppt compared to benchmark) students which indicates outstanding quality learning resources for these subject areas. As described earlier, both of these areas are supported by high specification specialist laboratories, simulated workspaces and technical equipment which is likely to play a role in students' more favourable perception of their total 'learning resources'. This is in contrast to curriculum areas such as Law, Business and Computing which are predominantly reliant on 'standard' physical learning resources such as library and IT facilities. Conversely, the measure for part-time students relating to learning resources is materially in line with or above benchmark (+1.1ppt). In summary, while the most recent data indicates a marginally improving picture in terms of the students experience for *Learning resources,* the College recognises that there is work to do to continuously improve the student experience around the learning environment.

The College's virtual learning platform, CANVAS, has been redeveloped in recent years to enhance the learning and teaching on programmes. CANVAS is a cloud-based platform which is designed to work across all modern devices with mobile apps available offering parity with the desktop browser experience and thus fitting with modern ways of learning and meeting the needs of our students. CANVAS learning support are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by telephone, chat and email to support any student queries. Students find this reassuring as responses to their own queries can be obtained during their own individualised learning times. CANVAS provides a wide range of tools and services to support learning, particularly blended and distance learning, with both synchronous and asynchronous discussion tools available. Staff also make full use of the discussion forums, chat tools and web conferencing facilities. These opportunities provide students with a rich environment in which to learn, suited to their own individual learning times.

At DNCG there has been investment in a range of practical resources to support delivery of programmes at both campuses. Sport students benefit from the use of a real- world stadium environment since the relocation into the facilities at the ECO Power stadium. All classroom and theoretical sessions take place within the stadium, allowing students to experience a real-life sporting environment, with organic learning and professional learning environment. Furthermore, a new state of the art sport rehabilitation and therapy suit installed into the stadium which has helped improve performance on the Anatomy and Physiology module by supporting students to experience an elite environment. Library resources also improved with the addition of a new Sport specific library, and after consultation with employers, the College invested in new contemporary sports equipment to enhance the students learning environment. Similarly, there has been a collaboration[41] with Yorkshire's biggest athletics track which allows students to train there, facilitating more specialised and interactive sessions in excellent sporting facilities. Practical lessons are delivered at DNCG in the purpose-built HE STEM laboratories which consists of specific microbiology, chemistry and dissection laboratories alongside several general laboratories. At University Campus Doncaster, there are two laboratories which support learning and teaching within the programme.

For Health and Social Care programmes, both campuses benefit from fully equipped mock hospital wards with beds and the associated monitoring equipment that enables students to practice their practical skills in a safe environment. This includes heart monitoring, resuscitation equipment and patient lifting equipment. Our Training Facility is a specialist hospital simulated environment providing a range of equipment including; a hoist; first aid CPR mannequins with compression monitor; first aid equipment; wheel chairs; three nursing stations with specialist hospital beds and

care bathing facilities; a clinical practice area for taking vital signs; a care practice area with one bed, bath, toilet and sink and folding medical screens; moving and handling equipment; nursing stations fully equipped with CPR resuscitation masks and bags; emergency injuries simulation kit and infection control kit; and a theory station for lecture based delivery. There has been significant investment into practical resources for Health and Social Care programmes, including necessary training equipment for some of core skills for care including catheterisation models, basic BLS training and also an age simulation suit, which the students can wear to gain an understanding of lifespan development, allowing students to gain a practical understanding of the challenges facing the elderly.

In response to the pandemic, programme teams moved very swiftly and adeptly to the Microsoft Team platform to deliver high quality teaching and learning via synchronous and asynchronous lectures and seminar activities. Engagement with these could be easily monitored using the platform's analytics. Using this, staff could monitor cohorts or individual students to ensure full engagement or to offer targeted academic support where needed.

To conclude, the overall NSS22 score for *Learning resources* was 74%, which was an increase of 11% on the years score for *Learning resources*, which demonstrates the effectiveness of a range of interventions as described above to improve the students experience in this regard. It is anticipated that the positive student experience will continue in the coming years as a result of the consolidated approach to support and successful navigation of the 'settling-in' period post-merger plus the necessary adaptations during the pandemic.

Recently, the College has made significant investment to support this journey of ongoing improvement to the student learning experience by creating a new post in the Director of Academic Services and Digital Learning, which will be a key role within the college to support all curriculum with digital skills and delivery, encompassing library and research functions and digital teaching and learning. This role will contribute to the strategic direction and leadership of the whole service whilst also being directly responsible for the management and development of Library Services and Resources and Digital Learning technologies, systems, and tools. Future priorities include development of a combination of traditional teaching methods, such as in-person instruction and lectures, with a greater use of technology and online learning platforms. This will include the use of augmented & virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and other technologies to enhance the learning experience. Additionally, there is likely to be a greater emphasis on personalised and self-directed learning, as well as on skills development and lifelong learning.

The student experience measure for *Student Voice*, as measured by the NSS indicates that for full-time student satisfaction is broadly in line with benchmark, indicating a high-quality outcome for this metric however the contrary is the case for part-time students. This is largely due to the reduced attendance by part-time students, as the majority of student representative meetings and student-attended committees operate don a face-to face basis pre-pandemic, however more recently a hybrid approach is being used to widen participation to as many students as possible. There is still a challenge associated with engaging part-time students, many of whom are on distance-learning programmes, as often they have more competing commitments compared to full-time students (notably work commitments), so it is difficult for them to commit to or recognise the opportunities in place to express Student Voice.

Student representation at DNCG is facilitated on a range of committees including student council, HE Academic Board and its sub-committees. The student voice is captured in a number of mechanisms in relation to their engagement with a quality learning experience. Module Evaluation Questionnaires (MEQs) ask the students to comment on teaching and learning, academic support, assessment and feedback, learning resources and transferable skills/employability. Students are also fully embedded into the HE academic infrastructure which is a deliberative structure to ensure student engagement. Programme Committee Meetings are held three times a year and these offer opportunities for student cohort representatives to speak about their learning experiences, specific to their programme. Any concerns noted can then be acted upon quickly making the teaching and learning responsive and student focussed (within the boundaries of the validated programme).

Students are invited to complete one of two satisfaction surveys each academic year to collate feedback on the overall student experience. The Higher Education Survey is an internal survey which mirrors the structure and format of the National Student Survey. It is completed by all students who are not in scope to complete the NSS in the academic year. One of the objectives of these surveys to identify any areas of dissatisfaction at the earliest opportunity, rather than wait for the NSS survey in the final year. This enables us to take earlier action and improve the students experience on programme, The inclusion of all students not included in the NSS sample, also enables students on for example one-year programmes not eligible for NSS to have a voice and provide feedback on their experience. This is a deliberate strategy to familiarise students with the NSS format as well as provide Programme Teams with comparable satisfaction rates for all levels of student.

The National Student Survey (NSS) offers a barometer to gauge this institutions levels of satisfaction and, in relation to teaching and learning, we have many recent examples of very high levels of overall satisfaction in the NSS[j] including:

- FdSc Health and Social Care 2022 (100%)
- FdSc Mental Health and Wellbeing 2022 (100%)
- FdA Children's Learning and Development 2022 (95%)
- HND Creative Media Production 2022 (100%)
- FdSc Sport and Exercise 2022 (92%)

3. Student Outcomes

3.1 Positive Outcomes

The underpinning philosophy embedded at DNCG to support student success and progression is via scholarship, engagement and employability (SEE) themes, which play a significant role in the overall quality of the learning experience for students, by ensuring connectivity between all aspects of the learning experience. This philosophy is highly effective for DNCG students in promoting self-learning, professional excellence and academic confidence to enable them to progress beyond their academic journey. SEE provides students with the opportunity to enrich and extend their learning experience beyond the boundaries of the programme of study, demonstrating knowledge and understanding through applied situations. Ultimately, the aim of this philosophy is to develop graduates who possess those essential skills which will enable them to make valuable contributions to society and have the ability to adapt to new challenges.

The development of the centralised ADAPT team is a key restructure which will support DNCG students to successful outcomes in the future. Early indicators suggest improved outcomes for students engaging in some initiatives (such as the pre-entry programmes) as displayed in Table 3, however further work is ongoing to ensure a wider audience is captured and encouraged to participate with the range of support and enhancement activities that are provided. Reconfiguration of the academic and pastoral support department is also a positive response to help the academic teams to address the support provided for all underrepresented groups, as it will enable targeted interventions and closer monitoring to be undertaken. The team's focus is the student journey, ensuring that at each stage, students can access the information, assistance and opportunities to help them make informed decisions, succeed in their studies and gain maximum benefit from their HE experience. In preparation for progression into employment DNCG provides outstanding support, enabling students to source work placements that meets their needs, interests and professional ambitions. Clear and supportive arrangements are in place to ensure that placement opportunities are appropriate and beneficial to the individuals professional development. Placements within the workplace are a key component that contributes to student employability and professional development, providing the opportunity for students to enhance their personal and professional development in line with their career objectives.

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[j] NSS 2021 and NSS 2022 data

An integral part of focussing on the complete student journey is pre-entry programmes to support students progressing into Higher Education. This is particularly pertinent to DNCG students, many of whom require additional support to re-enter education as mature students, and/or who require additional support and reassurance regarding their educational journey. In support, data also shows that over 51% of entrants present 'non typical entry criteria'[k], which usually presents additional challenges in terms of supporting students on their studies.

Recent pre-entry programmes included: Introduction to Higher Education; Financial Support; Disabled Students Allowance; Wellbeing Support; Time Management; Basic Academic Writing Skills; and Critical Thinking. Student feedback[42] from the online pre-entry workshops was overwhelmingly positive:
- 99% agreed that the 'Workshop helped prepare for my studies'
- 100% agreed that the 'Workshop was informative'
- 100% agreed that the 'Workshop was helpful'
- 98% stated that they would recommend the workshops to a friend starting at DNCG
- 96% stated that they would continue to access the ADAPT support sessions

It is clear from this feedback that students value this type of support and have identified how it could continue to support them in their educational journey. Internally-held data indicates that for students enrolling in 2020/21, of those participating in a pre-entry programme of activity, 92% completed or continued in their programme of study. This represents a value above both the current aggregate continuation metric of 81%, and the benchmark matric of 83%, and whilst is not representative of all students, it provides a useful measure to support ongoing interventions such as these which have been effectively piloted.

Continual engagement is key to maintaining this level of support and the ADAPT team are continuing to implement ways to capture more student interaction with support activities. There is also an established process whereby students are identified (many pre-entry) in relation to potential DSA applications, with 119 additional students identified in 2022/23 resulting in an additional 97 claims for DSA. A clear message from these activities is that early intervention is key to supporting DNCG students, alongside active encouragement towards accessing available support. In addition, financial assistance was provided to 340 students in 2020/21, with emergency COVID support the main type of assistance required, followed by DSA contributions.

Now that the ADAPT team is established, the next steps in ensuring a highly effective approach to success and progression for DNCG students will be to successfully embed methods to:

- Standardise the DNCG approach to capturing data on all aspects of the student journey, from pre-entry to employment;
- Further develop pre-entry support to engage more students;
- Develop the DNCG alumni network to further support evidence of successful progression of DNCG graduates.

Continuation remains a challenge for DNCG, with the most recent aggregated continuation indicator for full-time students at 80.5 (-2.8ppt below benchmark), however Years 3 and 4 (most recent) of the data suggests an improving picture for full-time continuation on previous years data. The Year 3 indicator reports a very high-quality indicator for full-time continuation, although the Year 4 indicator is marginally below benchmark. However, these two cohorts are those which were most affected by disruption to learning as a result of the pandemic, with associated lockdowns and subsequent changes to learning and teaching. Part-time continuation is broadly in line with benchmark however, indicating a very high quality indicator.

In contrast, completion rates broadly align with benchmark for both full-time and part-time students, indicating very high-quality outcomes for all students for this measure. This is now effectively

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[k] Defined for the purposes of this submission to include 'Access, foundation or other courses at 65 tariff points or higher' plus 'none, unknown or other' entry criteria as classified in the OfS Size and shape of provision data dashboard

supported by the outstanding support provided by the Student Experience and Engagement team via the ADAPT team as previously described, and it is anticipated that this activity will also positively impact on continuation over the next few years as students become familiar with the accessible support available. As mentioned previously, DNCG was established in 2017 following the merger of two colleges, which may have resulted in some disruption to student life due to the rearrangement of facilities and campuses to better suit broader College needs, as described above. At the Scunthorpe site in 2018, there was a move to a new dedicated HE building (campus) which resulted in the immediate perceived loss of some larger facilities by some students. Although these facilities were HE-specific, including contemporary teaching and social spaces, the campus move potentially negatively impacted the student perception of their experience. Similarly, at the Doncaster campus, HE was merged back into the main FE campus, albeit with a distinct HE area, which again meant a perception of loss by some students. Mergers can be difficult, and it is not always possible to completely manage student expectations in this respect, although it is positive to see overall high-quality metrics for student experience, the mergers and its associated restructuring of the physical resources available, exacerbated by the impacts of the pandemic shortly afterwards may have impacted on student retention and continuation.

Graduate Outcomes (GO) progression data indicates very high-quality outcomes for students, measuring only 0.5ppt below benchmark, therefore broadly in line with expectations. Survey response rates remain low with 39% complete and partially complete responses received against a national response rate of 52%. The latest GO data by activity and domicile remain generally in line with the sector, with the College exceeding sector totals for Employment and Further Study (+1%) and part-time employment (+5%):

- 89% of DNCG graduates are in paid employment and/or further study;
- 83% of DNCG graduates are in paid employment;
- 26% of DNCG graduates are involved in further study.

Students continue to provide positive reflection of activity with:

- 86% reporting they agree or strongly agree that their current activity is meaningful (-2%);
- 73% reporting they agree or strongly agree that their current activity fits with their future aspirations (-2%);
- 75% of students agree or strongly agree that they are utilising what they have learnt during their studies in their current activity.

Work-based learning is an integral component of many of the programmes offered at DNCG and in many cases can offer students exposure into industry through their higher education experience. Students are expected to either be working within, or gain a placement within an appropriate setting as a mandatory requirement for programmes with a work placement component. Working within an appropriate setting underpins the students professional development relevant to their industry and is reinforced by modules whereby students are required to undertake action research to enable them to link theory to practice. One example of this can be seen in the Effective Learning Environments Module at Level 4 (Early Years Education) in which students implemented change in an area within the setting as the result of an audit. Similarly, the Research Module at Level 5 enables students to carry out an action research project in a setting. Feedback from the external examiner in this area stated:

> "*The programme reflects the exigencies of the current healthcare and social care environment and the levels of assessment are germane and topical.', 'This degree of choice is to be commended as students may have experience of variegated settings or indeed preferences as they may be aspirational re future career in a particular sector of health/social care.*" [43]

3.2 Educational Gains

The typical student demographic at DNCG is embedded within the defined widening participation context, as defined in Section 1, however defining educational gains for DNCG students is more nuanced and complex than those definitions within the APP. Measuring social value, and social mobility is a difficult task, yet it is these concepts that perhaps contribute to much of the educational gain experienced by DNCG students. DNCG students are typically domiciled at a local address, demonstrating the importance of the College as to the local provider of higher education, facilitating non-traditional pathways into education, particularly for mature students (70%) and for women (76%). For mature students, re-entering education can be daunting especially for those who have multiple conflicting home and life commitments compared to a typical school-leaver entering higher education, and the motivation to enter/re-enter education may differ from their younger counterparts. A recent OfS Insight report stated that 'the opportunity to study as a mature student is essential for equality of opportunity'[44] Since 2019/20, there has been a gradual increase in all age groups classified as mature (21-24 years, 25-29 years, 30 years and over) enrolling onto higher education programmes in England[45]. At DNCG, with over 50% of full-time students, and 45% of part-time students in the IMD quintiles 1-2 category. In addition, these educational gains apply to young entrants to DNCG also. According to TUNDRA data for DNCG, 65% of full-time students, and 62% of part-time students originate from TUNDRA quintiles 1-2, supporting a majority student demographic as originating from deprived areas. With the majority of entrants falling into age categories of 21 and over, the ambition would be to broadly tailor educational gain to these particular characteristics.

McGrath *et al.* (2015)[46] define 'learning gain' as the "distance travelled", or the difference between the skills, competencies, content, knowledge and personal development demonstrated by students at two points in time". Whilst this may be useful in measuring some aspects of academic performance over the course of a programme to summarise positive outcomes for a student, it is more difficult to measure and account for the "added value" elements, such as social value and mobility.

Therefore, the College has broadly defined the educational gains specific to its student population as follows:
- Improving educational outcomes across generations by supporting students with non-typical or 'low-tariff' entry criteria to successful outcomes (i.e. distance travelled);
- Developing academic and professional confidence through exposure to real-world situations and and/or 'unfamiliar' settings;
- Raising aspiration to add societal and community benefit (social value) by investing intellectual wealth within the community.

The aims of these educational gains are tailored to the DNCG student demographic, specifically linking the provision of higher education in a social mobility cold spot to the contribution towards the social mobility agenda. The College recognises the challenges associated with improving educational outcomes in areas where such outcomes are typically poor, in areas where economic opportunities may be limited and as such the existing interventions have been tailored to address these challenges.

As discussed, a key educational gain for DNCG student is social mobility and social value, which can be modelled against development of core employability and professional development skills. The BA Criminal Justice programme was referred to by the external examiner reflecting upon the 2021/22 academic year as the gold standard in embedding employability into both curriculum design and delivery, stating it is *"above and beyond that offered by similar institutions"* [47]. In addition, the academic contact stated that the students "*undoubtedly benefit from graduate employability and further opportunities*' that the programme facilitates". This programme has been designed using the HEA Employability Framework by incorporating an employability pathway into the programme. This takes the form of a skills-based model at level four, Academic and Professional Development, that prioritises the professional development of the student. Communication to students regarding the value of transferable skills, and their ownership and development of these skills, was the focus of programme design. Recognising that this development is central to the creation of an employability identity and that a key focus of the curriculum is the gainful employment of its cohort, leading to an

alignment between students, the programme and the teaching team into a mutual investment in their educational gain. At level 5, students undertake a 'Work Related Learning' module that requires the student to gain voluntary work within the criminal justice sector to both gain experience and to test, and reflect upon, their further professional development and to give them the valuable sector related work experience many graduates lack. The programme has made some significant links with stakeholders[i], and this pathway culminates into the 'Education into Employment' module at level six that prepares student for the graduate sector by exploring employment opportunities and often successfully gaining employment before graduating. Many of our students come to us with confidence issues and a lack of employable identity, the purpose of this pathway is to prepare them for their exit with a strengthened resilience, work experience, good references, a toolkit for success and a confidence in what they have gained on programme. The plan is to expand this pilot development to other curriculum areas.

Additionally, Sports students have benefitted from a range of enhancements to their specialist programmes which has contributed to their wider educational gains including treating regional and international rugby teams to therapies during tournaments, school internships, providing health checks to sports teams and presenting research posters to employers. Offering real-world experiences such as these can contribute to students' professional confidence, and this is a major contributor to the very high-quality outcome on student progression. As mentioned previously, supporting students to successful professional outcomes is a key contributor to social mobility and the ability of DNCG graduates to gain meaningful professional employment (often remaining in the local area).

Therefore, to effectively measure educational gains relevant to DNCG students, the following actions will be prioritised over the next four years:
- Embed a longitudinal process to effectively analyse student data to measure the identified educational gains of DNCG students from entry to employment;
- Use the data from the longitudinal study to measure comparative attainment rates compared to other providers;
- Establish a clear strategy to further engage with the alumni community to enable continued measurement of post-educational gains and successes.

To support these aims relating to effective and sustained management of the student experience and outcomes, the College has made significant investment to support this journey of ongoing improvement to the student learning experience by creating the Director of Academic Services and Digital Learning post (as described in Section 2, p18), and recently revised positions in the Head of Quality and Regulation, and the Head of Student Experience, Employability and Recruitment. These roles will be key to managing the overarching student experience at DNCG over the next three years, with the view to maintaining the very high quality experience already established, and improving areas to excel in all aspects of the student journey. In summary, DNCG offers a very high quality educational experience to its students, offering an accessible and aspirational outlet for people in the region to achieve meaningful higher education qualifications which add value and intellectual wealth back into the local communities.

> *"Tutors' support, inspiration, communication and feedback help me grow daily. The studies are well designed, with a good balance between theory and practicals. Learning resources are outstanding, starting with the library and finishing with STEM laboratories, which are so well equipped, and practicals are so interesting that you want to spend more time there.*

> *Studying here is a pleasure for me; this experience will always be related to the best memories."* **FdSc Biosciences final year student[48]**

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[i] Including NACRO (The National Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders), Doncaster Youth Offending Services, Phoenix Womens Aid, Cheswold Park Mental Health Hospital, The Cascade Foundation and Doncaster Childrens Trust.

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