

## **Submission template for TEF 2023 – Blackburn College**

### **1. Introduction and Place-Based Context**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

- 1.1.1 We are Blackburn College. We have around 1100 Higher Education (HE) students and curricula situated within a larger Further Education (FE) context and have delivered HE for over forty years. This submission has provided the College with a welcome opportunity to explicitly evaluate the extent to which our HE infrastructure, teaching, learning and assessment activities provide excellent educational experiences and outcomes for students as set out within the TEF 2023 assessment framework. We understand from the recent review of research that HE teaching excellence is an 'elusive and inherently subjective' concept. We have however, been able to use reflections on the previous TEF and the features of excellence within Annex A of the current TEF (2023) guidance. Our approach is to substantiate claims we make with relevant evidence which we believe relates to student experiences and outcomes which are above the minimum high-quality requirements for the ongoing conditions for registration.
- 1.1.2 We have adopted the optional provider submission template for TEF 2023 to report on our HE context, and the evidence which will substantiate excellence within the two aspects of student experience and student outcomes. The evidence for the former focusses on excellence within students' academic experiences, students' assessment activities, resources, student support and engagement practices; whilst for the latter, we relate to the positive outcomes and educational gains our students achieve from their studies.
- 1.1.3 For us, HE teaching excellence is linked to our continuous engagement with learning and improving the student experience and the experiences of other stakeholders such as staff and employers who impact on this experience and are impacted by it. It is located in everything we do to support students to succeed and is situated within HE-specific outstanding teaching, learning and assessment practices. It is driven by a targeted HE strategy [001] and infrastructure, an innovative and engaging curriculum, outstanding individual and collective expertise and productive partnerships with our Awarding Bodies and Place-based organisations [002] The next section sets out the context in which we work, and introduces relevant contextual features about our Place.

#### **1.2 Blackburn**

- 1.2.1 Blackburn is a large town in Lancashire, North-West England situated some 21 miles North-West of Manchester, and is at the heart of the Unitary Local Authority of Blackburn with Darwen. It is the largest town in the area of East Lancashire also known as Pennine

Lancashire. Historically, Blackburn was a key part of the cotton industry, and around a hundred years ago was known as the weaving capital of the world. However, the textile sector fell into decline from the mid-20th century and Blackburn subsequently faced similar challenges to other post-industrial northern towns, including deindustrialisation, economic deprivation and housing problems.

- 1.2.2 Within its population today there are distinctive and significant demographic features, most notably that the proportion of the population identifying as White British was 69.22%, compared to a national average of 90% [003]. The 2019 Indices of Deprivation revealed that Blackburn with Darwen was ranked as the 15<sup>th</sup> most deprived area out of 317 districts and unitary authorities in England, when measured by the rank of average Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) rank and is also in the most deprived 10% in England.
- 1.2.3 A recent Annual Population Survey 2020 [004] reveals that 11.1% of Blackburn with Darwen residents have no formal qualifications, compared with 7.5% for the North West and 6.4% nationally. A lower proportion of Blackburn with Darwen adults are qualified to Level 2 or above, (69.5% compared to 76.9% for the North West and 78.2% for Great Britain) and similarly are least likely to be qualified to Level 4 (29.9%). Blackburn with Darwen has an unemployment rate currently of 5.4%, which is 1.2% above the North West rate and 0.8% above the UK unemployment rate. There are 16.5% (7,300) of households with no adult in work. Consequently, there are high levels of social deprivation, and low basic skills levels.
- 1.2.4 In recognition of the ethnic diversity of the Borough, in 2018 the Council was selected as one of five pilot areas for the Government's Integration Area Programme. This is overseen by a Local Improvement Partnership (LIP), of which the College was a founder member. The College has a pivotal role to play in this 'local Place strategy', and a recognition too that having a base in the largest town in Pennine Lancashire, it draws its students from a wider area, impacting upon and influencing the broader economic prosperity and social cohesion by addressing many of the Higher Educational needs of the population from the wider surrounding area.

### **1.3 Blackburn College**

- 1.3.1 The College was established in 1888, by public subscription, and originally specialised in textiles and engineering, reflecting from the start the needs of the local population and industry. The Victoria Building in which the College was established still stands today as the Gateway to the campus, and is now a listed building for which substantial renovations are in the process of being undertaken. The remainder of the campus was built in five phases, between 2005 and 2015, at a cost in excess of £40 million. This includes a bespoke HE building, opened in 2009, at a cost of £14 million. Blackburn College is now the largest FE college in East Lancashire, and one of the largest providers of college-based HE in

England. The campus is at the heart of the town centre, adjacent to the Blakey Moor regeneration zone (a key Council priority) and with nearby bus and rail transport links.

- 1.3.2 Notable historical curriculum developments at the College include the commencement of A-Level programmes in the mid-1980s, and a series of significant developments to the Higher Education portfolio in the 1990s and early 2000s which led to the initiation of the partnerships with Lancaster University, the University of South Wales (formerly Glamorgan) and the University of Central Lancashire. All three of these deep and embedded partnerships remain in place today, some thirty years after their inception, and our students tell us how much they value being able to get a degree from a top University whilst living and studying at home.
- 1.3.3 The University Centre at Blackburn College is an anchor institution for the local area providing opportunities for the local population to study at a higher level and achieve a HE qualification. Ofsted, at their review in 2022, reported that ‘Since the previous inspection, the principal, senior leaders and governors have successfully changed the culture of the college. They have developed an ethos of high expectations, tolerance and respect. Leaders and managers monitor sensitively staff workload and well-being. A range of quality improvement strategies have had a positive impact on raising standards and improving the quality of education across most subject areas’.
- 1.3.4 The current Higher Education curriculum contains the following provision which is ‘in scope’:

Curriculum Area	Programmes contained within this area
<b>Academic Group of Technology and Sport</b>	BEng Electrical and Electronics, Mechanical and General Engineering (on teach out) HNC/D Engineering HNC Construction FdSc and Top Up (Hons) Sports Coaching BSc Cyber Security and BSc Software Development including foundation year
<b>Academic Group of Education and Humanities</b>	BA (Hons) Education Studies FdA and Top Up (Hons) Teaching and Learning Support (Primary) FdA and Top Up (Hons) Early Childhood Studies PGCE and Cert HE (Initial Teaching Training) Joint Honours Provision including subject areas of English Language, English Literature, History, Politics, Sociology, History (on teach out)
<b>Academic Group of Health</b>	BSc (Hons) Psychology including foundation year

	FdA and Top Up (Hons) Integrative Counselling and Psychotherapy FdA and Top Up (Hons) Disability Studies
<b>Academic Group of Community</b>	FdA Health and Social Care FdA and Top Up (Hons) Working with Children and Young People (formerly 'Positive Practice') FdA and Top Up (Hons) Criminology Cert HE Families, Young People and Children Practitioner Apprentice
<b>Academic Group of Creative and Digital</b>	BA (Hons) Graphic Design BA (Hons) Animation and Games Art BA (Hons) Fine Art BA (Hons) Photography and Moving Image
<b>Academic Group of Business, Finance and Law</b>	HNC/D Business BA (Hons) Business and Management inc. foundation year FdA and Top Up (Hons) Accounting LLB LLM

1.3.5 Our strategic goal and mission as a College is:

***Transforming students' lives and our community through excellent education, training and support; and our vision is aspiring, innovating and achieving through excellence.***

- 1.3.6 The delivery of the mission and supporting values is set and monitored by the Corporation Board, which sits within a purposive and focussed governance structure, integrating strategic and operational priorities in a cohesive whole. The Board itself has a membership steeped in the local area and its needs and priorities, with representatives from major employers in both the public and private sectors, along with leading academics who provide educational rigour and oversight. Specific Board members have identified key roles in relation to our HE curriculum. Key to the work of the Board and its leading sub-committees is student representation, supported by the College's active Students' Union, and elected by the whole student body.
- 1.3.7 The impact of our current work as a College was neatly summed up by an article in FE News (July 2022) which highlighted that we achieved the highest student satisfaction rating in the North West of England in the 2021/22 NSS survey, scoring an overall 84% against a benchmark of 77%. Indeed, we met or exceeded the benchmark in almost all of the NSS

survey questions, and three curriculum areas ((LLB (Hons) in Law; Early Childhood Studies and Education Studies) had 100% overall satisfaction [005].

- 1.3.8 This document has been prepared by the team from the University Centre at Blackburn College, led by the Vice Principal for Curriculum and Quality and co-ordinated by the Assistant Principal (HE). Data for the review has been submitted by individual members of staff to a central database, populated between August 2022 and December 2022. This has been used as the basis for a series of staff engagement seminars, attended by staff at all grades, from as wide a cross-section as possible of the disciplines offered. Student representatives, including the Students' Union president, have also been fully involved and engaged as the process of compiling this document has proceeded. What follows is a discussion focused on the evidence which substantiates claims of excellence made within each of the two aspects and their key themes.

## 2. Student Experience

### 2.1 Academic Experience and Assessment

**SE1 The provider has embedded outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are highly effective and tailored to supporting its students' learning, progression and attainment.**

- 2.1.1 Our HE Teaching, Learning and Assessment (TLA) Strategy [006] recognises our specific standing as a provider of college-based HE, and articulates our determination to ensure that students' academic experiences are shaped by a virtuous cycle of teaching, learning and assessment excellence informed by both research-informed practice and practice-led research. This Strategy seeks to place authentic and excellent teaching, learning and assessment at the heart of what we do, and to embody and incorporate a culture of high expectations and continuous improvement.
- 2.1.2 Our students tell us that we have outstanding teaching, learning, feedback and assessment processes, evidenced within our average satisfaction results for full-time students over the past three years of 85%, against a benchmark of 84.4% in our National Student Survey (NSS) satisfaction scores. We have consistently performed above the benchmark over the last three years and our most recent satisfaction level of (86.3% - 2021/22) exceeds the benchmark by a margin of +2.7% [002]. Within this, our satisfaction levels for students over 21 years (the majority of our cohort) are at 88.1% and students from the most deprived quartiles of our population also record high satisfaction rates of 85% [007].
- 2.1.3 Our internal Annual Monitoring Reviews (AMRs) and the supporting Programme Evaluation Questionnaires (PEQs) [008] also consistently confirm that students are very satisfied with programme delivery. For example, students on the BA (Honours) in Business Studies in their PEQs for 2020/21 were highly satisfied with their teaching and assessment experiences which they believe would equip them with the skills necessary for the business world after graduation. Similarly, 100% of the Psychology students commenting on the

teaching on their course within the PEQs in December 2020 commented that 'staff were good at explaining things.' Further examples of positive observation within AMRs and PEQs for other programmes are available in the supporting evidence folder **[008]**.

- 2.1.4 Our excellence in providing outstanding academic experiences for our students also relates to how we consistently adapt and flex our approaches to programme delivery when necessary. This was particularly evident for the duration of the pandemic, which impacted the academic experiences of student cohorts across all disciplines. Our External Course Consultants and External Examiners **[009]** explicitly recognise how programme teams thoughtfully adapted their teaching and learning practices during this period to ensure that students continued to have productive academic experiences in line with their expectations. For example, the Course Consultant for the BSc Honours in Psychology reported good practice in how the programme team provided effective distance-learning opportunities for students; and students themselves confirmed that the Psychology programme team, went 'above and beyond' to support them with continued engagement in sessions. The BA and FdA Teaching and Learning Support students also fully appreciated the way the programme team flexed teaching and learning approaches by providing an accessible and productive Virtual Learning Environment, and targeted additional support through recorded sessions to keep them engaged in their learning **[009]**.
- 2.1.5 External Examiners for Education Studies and Accountancy **[009]** agreed that there was 'no evidence that the lockdown and disruption affected student achievement at any level in any module, nor evidence that they have had any direct or negative impact on the quality of provision or rigour and fairness of assessment'.
- 2.1.6 Teaching and Learning has improved significantly over a period of four years due to the implementation of the HE Teaching and Learning strategy and the associated operational teaching Blueprint.
- 2.1.7 In relation to assessment, our NSS results **[007]** have improved over the past three years with our most recent cohort expressing 79.4%, satisfaction with the assessment practices (0.6% above benchmark) and with pronounced satisfaction levels of 80.9% for students over 21 and 79.7% for those from the lowest deprivation quintiles. This reassures us that our assessment practices continue to improve and address the particular priorities of all of our students.
- 2.1.8 We also have good feedback on the work of our academic teams in successfully improving assessment and marking practices in response to student feedback. For example, within the AMR for our Early Years provision (June 2021) **[008]** students reported a 100% satisfaction rate within the June PEQ, a substantial rise from the equivalent score of 69% within an earlier (December 2020) questionnaire, resulting from planned interventions that the course team undertook.

- 2.1.9 The strength of our assessment practices are consistently endorsed by the Course Consultants and External Examiners for the different programmes. For example, the Course Consultant for the BSc Honours in Psychology Course [009] highlighted that the assessment feedback students received is a positive strength and confirmed that students spoke to them of both the timeliness and the “excellent quality” of the feedback they received. Further examples include commendation from the External Examiner for the BA and FDA Teaching Support programme 2021/22 [009] on the highly-detailed feedback/feed forward which students on the programme received; and comments that it was ‘lovely to see the detail of constructive annotation within text ... ..correction of Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar (SPAG) issues which is...enormously helpful to students.’
- 2.1.10 Further examples of our excellence in this area include the explicit commendation from both the External Examiner and Course Consultant for the Disability and Inclusive Practice Degree [009] on the outstanding approaches that course teams took in teaching and supporting students who were also employed, using additional assignment workshops and one-to-one live formative feedback on their ongoing work-related tasks. In addition, students on this course appreciated the draft portals placed in Moodle following a formative assessment workshop day as a welcome opportunity to gain timely, concise, and constructive feedback to inform any improvements they needed to address. Further, and during the revalidation of this programme in 2020 by Lancaster University [010], the programme team was commended for the inclusive approach to assessment, especially the targeted support for Level 4 students. This was achieved by providing substantial guidance within the assignment briefs to benefit the assessment experiences of all students during the initial year, and to encourage timely submissions.
- 2.1.11 The role of our Academic Coaches is also a key aspect of our curriculum offer, with assistance provided in areas including help with preparation for assignments, time management and allied skills.
- 2.1.12 From the evidence identified above, we know that we continuously improve academic and assessment experiences for all of our students to make sure that these experiences are outstanding, and our students and external experts confirm our success in doing this. Such direct evidence tells us that we are outstanding in carefully adjusting teaching, learning and assessment approaches to meet the priorities of all of our students.

**SE2 Course content and delivery inspire the provider’s students to actively engage in and commit to their learning, and stretch students to develop knowledge and skills to their fullest potential.**

- 2.2.1 The content and substance of our curriculum is demonstrably shaped by our overall strategic pledge [001] to ‘transform students’ lives and our community through excellent education, training and support’.

- 2.2.2 Our excellence comes from our explicit commitment to the seven themes within our HE Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy **[006]** which demonstrably inform course development and delivery by incorporating co-creation, collaboration and accessibility to the local community and economy, linked to the Skills Agenda. Ofsted (2022) reported that ‘Leaders and managers design a curriculum that effectively reflects local, regional and national skills needs. They consult with employers frequently to ensure that the curriculum content meets the most up-to-date industry practices and standards’ **[011]**.
- 2.2.3 We also ensure that our cyclical reviews confirm that the course content remains relevant for the current and emerging priorities of our students and communities. For example, the rationale for the revalidation of the BA (Hons) in Education Studies **[012]** explicitly notes how this programme makes a ‘significant impact locally’ and how ‘student outputs from the Level 6 modules particularly have led to several initiatives that enrich communities’.
- 2.2.4 Demonstrable engagement of programme teams, cross-College senior colleagues, student representatives and relevant employers in these processes facilitates strong engagement with the wider objectives of the College, and the expressed student priorities. The impact of engagement with students for example is evident within the major amendments to the BSc (Hons) Psychology in April 2022 where students made substantial contributions as partners, and supported the inclusion of a Forensic Psychology Module at Level 6 **[013]**. One student involved in this process thanked the College for ‘an incredible opportunity, and a massive learning experience’ gained from her role on a Course Development Panel, acknowledging what it had provided her with in terms of confidence and networking skills.
- 2.2.5 The Development Review and Appeal Panel (DRAP) is the College’s central vehicle for considering, holistically, the development of new programmes, refreshment of existing provision, and closure/suspension of outdated provision across HE. The Panel has a broad and representative profile, and comprises cross-College staff at senior levels, and students. Minutes of the Panel and those of the Academic Board confirm the breadth and depth of the consultation undertaken **[014]**.
- 2.2.6 Our evidence of excellent delivery of courses rests in the sustained, innovative and diverse approaches we take to enthuse and inspire our student cohorts. For example, our Introduction to Psychology Module within the BSc (Hons) Psychology Degree **[013]** uses a ‘blog’ assignment focusing on the application of theory to practice, and the use of WordPress to develop skills that are transferrable while modules such as Biological Psychology feature extensive use of 3D online anatomical models.
- 2.2.7 We have also developed and embedded a carefully designed quality assurance and support mechanism to provide a continued improvement in course delivery **[015]**, and this includes learning walks and developmental lesson observations, continuous professional development, and standardisation events. We measure our success against a range of internal and external metrics including the *Office for Students*, Programme Evaluation



Questionnaires (PEQs) and the *National Student Survey*, as well as on-going student voice activities and employer forums – all of which feed into a robust Quality Cycle that incorporates Annual Programme Reviews and the HE Self-Evaluation Document.

- 2.2.8 We receive assurance about our course content and delivery from a number of independent sources. For example, the External Examiner Report for the FdA/BA Teaching and Learning Support Primary 2020/21 **[009]** notes that the programme content is ‘comprehensive, current and contextualised to meet the academic and preparation for workplace needs of the learners’, and that the accompanying assessments are ‘interesting, challenging and appropriately inclusive’.
- 2.2.9 Our employer engagement with the curriculum is both broad and deep, and operates at both strategic (College) and operational (Course) levels. We are an active partner in the Lancashire Skills Improvement Plan formation and delivery, and as this was one of the eight national trailblazer areas, it allowed us to gain direct input from a range of practitioners from relevant professions across current and potential future curriculum areas.
- 2.2.10 We also instigated the development of the Health Industry Board, which acts as a bridge between academia and the world of work, to the mutual benefit of both the College and the sector, and thus underpins our planned future curriculum development in the health arena with advice on requirements and relevant sectoral developments.
- 2.2.11 Recent developments in the Engineering curriculum led to responses from a wide range of Engineering employers from the wider Pennine Lancashire area, and these were reflective of companies of a widely-varying size and scope. The collective response served to influence and shape our future curriculum offer **[016]**.

**SE3 The provider uses research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement to contribute to an outstanding academic experience for its students.**

- 2.3.1 Our HE TLA strategy **[006]** reflects the shared understanding that research and scholarship are significant in informing and shaping the design and delivery of our courses. Our approach is embodied in our Scholarship Framework 2022 **[017]**, developed collaboratively with the Association of Colleges (AoC), which ensures that teaching teams have relevant industry experience, subject-knowledge and qualifications to provide outstanding teaching which is both research and practice-informed. This Framework is primarily operationalised by a Research and Scholarship Committee, whose terms of reference and minutes demonstrably encourage disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research and scholarship, and promote collaborative research relationships with industry and universities. It is further supported by the Ethical Research Group whose primary purpose is to identify and address ethical considerations. The impacts of this researched-focussed approach is consistent across our curriculum and is illustrated within the rich examples evidenced below:

**Example 1: Research-based practice** BA Education Studies take a metacognitive view of some modules in Year Three and used MS Teams to create a research group that planned an academic journal article around the use of psycho-geography and Art Brut in the Alternative Education module. This was extra-curricular and allowed the students to engage with an authentic research process with external publication as the goal. This stemmed from students' awareness of student-as-researcher projects held previously and responded to their desire to be recognised beyond the parameters of the course alone **[018]**.

**Example 4: Cross-disciplinary research** This is a current research exercise bringing together students from Education, Fine Arts and Counselling provision, facilitating meetings between them with a focus on creating a dialogue, and subsequently artefacts which represent the convergence of these three areas. The overall aim is to relocate the academic to the cultural social spaces within our community, and to develop themes relating to social practice **[018]**.

- 2.3.2 Our students have also been successful in obtaining paid research work as research assistants in a transport and social inclusion project organised by the University of Oxford, School of Geography and the Environment, examining barriers faced by people in Blackburn in using public transport **[018]**.
- 2.3.3 Students also have opportunities to engage explicitly with partner universities such as in the Lancaster University Education Conference 2022. They were able to present collaborative research undertaken with staff and both Criminology and Criminal Justice and Education students, with the latter being rewarded with the Conference Prize **[018]**. Criminology and Criminal Justice staff and students presented their approach to teaching, learning and

assessment through Visual Criminology pedagogy, and Education Studies staff and students showcased their pedagogical approaches integrating technology and projects into teaching and learning.

- 2.3.4 Students also had the opportunity to help at the Lancaster University Undergraduate Research Conference [018] both in presenting, and in the provision of technical support. These presentations covered '*Deaf artists - From struggle to success*' and '*What is the effect of migrant art on the issues of migration?*', and were rewarded with a certificate of participation in each case.
- 2.3.5 Our staff and students benefit from the partnership between Lancaster University and the Institute of Curriculum Enhancement [018] by accessing a series of workshops offered by leading education researchers and external experts on sector developments in HE pedagogies. We also support these external opportunities through in-house sessions with renowned speakers, and Law students, in particular, have benefitted from such presentations by a member of the House of Lords, and other judicial practitioners [018].
- 2.3.6 In-house CPD workshops also enable our staff to reflect and present on areas related to research-informed teaching, learning and assessment. The 2022 conference [018], for example, offered workshops on a broad range of topics such as Developing Critical Thinking Through Effective Questioning; Enabling Progress: Effective Feedback and Feed-Forward Techniques; Making an Impact Through Design and Delivery: Clear Expectations and Active Learning Techniques; Strategies for Student Engagement in College-Based Higher Education; and Lost Learning: 'Catch-Up' Learning Activities and Diagnostic Tests.
- 2.3.7 In these ways, research is explicitly undertaken, and demonstrably linked to the delivery of teaching and learning across our curriculum. Students develop their abilities to influence and articulate their ideas and build professional networks spanning the Lancaster University Partnership. In addition to giving presentations, students have the opportunity to participate in conference organisation, including technical support, steering group membership, chairing plenary sessions and providing a virtual tour of their respective campuses. In addition, to individual career development outcomes for CV and portfolio building, this is a really exciting way for students to present their research to an international audience, and benefit from undergraduate professional and disciplinary networks from around the world.

## **2.4 Resources, Support and Student Engagement**

**SE4 There is outstanding support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is embedded across the provider.**

- 2.4.1 Our imperative for ensuring that our staff have the academic and professional development they require is explicit within the five key drivers included with the College Organisational Development Plan (OD Plan) [019]. These drivers aim to make the student experience the best it can be; improve the staff experience; make sure everything we are doing is adding value; always looking for improvement and innovation; and working together to achieve our

common goal. Progress in this area is important. We monitor the effectiveness of our approach within the Learning and Quality (L&Q) Committee and senior leadership meetings.

2.4.2 Targeted CPD workshops are effective in supporting insightful research-informed teaching, learning and assessment through providing HE appropriate opportunities in areas such as:

- Developing critical thinking through effective questioning techniques.
- Enabling progress: effective feedback and feed forward techniques.
- Making an impact through design and delivery: clear explanations and active learning techniques.
- Strategies for student engagement in college-based HE.
- Lost learning catch-up action plans, learning activities and diagnostic tests.

2.4.3 The OD Annual Report for 2021/22 **[020]** reflects upon the further strengthening of the opportunities for staff to engage in HE-specific development during that academic year, focussing on regulations and metrics, quality improvement, student satisfaction and student outcomes. It concludes that these measures increased the satisfaction level from 75% in January 2021 to 97.5% at the later time of the Report, as reported within the Academic Board in November 2021 **[014]**.

2.4.4 The impacts of staff development at course level are also consistently articulated within the respective AMRs **[008]**. For example, within the 2021/22 Report for the FdA/BA Working with Children and Young People, there is confirmation that such developments appropriately supported tutors' research interests, strengthened curriculum priorities and enhanced their expertise as research supervisors. Recognition of the profound and positive impact that research and scholarly activity undertaken by the BA (Hons) in Fine Art staff has on the students' academic experience and enhancements in the delivery of modules such as Creative Futures and Professional Practice is reported within the AMR for this course. The excellent opportunity for staff to engage in external events, including those with Lancaster University, has enabled them to contribute to the wider development and debate fully within the HE landscape on areas such as 'The Transformational Power of Higher Education (Ashwin, 2021).

2.4.5 Individual case examples of staff professional development illustrate the impact of the research and study undertaken.

**Case Study One:** Practice based research, Peer reviewed and funded by the Arts Council England, Heritage Lottery, V+A etc. Appointed as Chair of National Festival of Making; artist in residence for the British Textile Biennial, Royal Commission for the 2022 Jubilee with art works acquired for permanent collections including the Tate Gallery, Manchester City Art Gallery and the Government Art Collection.

**Case Study Two:** Publication of a chapter entitled 'Visualising Injustice with Undergraduate Smartphone Photography' in 'Teaching Criminology and Criminal Justice: Challenges for HE (ed S, Young) published by Springer Press'. The author particularly highlights that it was the 'skill and hard work from both past and present HE Criminology students at Blackburn College (which) made this happen'.

**Case Study Three:** PhD work focussed on the significance of people and community in technology enhanced learning spaces. The subsequent learning platform created - Community Open Online Courses (Coocs.org) offers a space for learning and teaching that transcends barriers to engagement in education. The focus is on having people develop the skills of production, not just consumption, shifting the ownership of what is taught to move beyond solely institutions and into the community. COOCs are used by students and staff in formal settings to expand their reach, and by communities and charities to share learning and develop the ways we create courses.

**SE5 The provider ensures a supportive learning environment and its students have access to a wide and readily-available range of outstanding quality academic support tailored to their needs.**

- 2.5.1 We prioritise our efforts to support our students and know that this support has to be effective in addressing the specific requirements of our student cohort to ensure that the support we give is effective in addressing their diverse and specific requirements. The results of the NSS [007] for the previous four academic years confirm that our students greatly value the accessible, targeted and effective support they receive. Although our full-time cohort express overall satisfaction of 80.5% (0.2 % below the benchmark), our ongoing and targeted review of our support services has led to a steady increase in satisfaction levels during the four-year period under review from 76.9% to 80.5%. Within this, the current satisfaction for students over 21 years old being 82.9% and those from the lowest deprivation quintiles being 82.1%.
- 2.5.2 Examples of our attention to the needs of our students more broadly than the curriculum they are studying came in the form of a well-being week for all students, to enjoy activities such as mindfulness, arts, crafts and a variety of other sessions and in November 2022 with activities carried-out in a Mental Health week.
- 2.5.3 Our consistent evaluation of, and contextualised and enhanced developments in, the support services for students have enabled us to steadily increase student satisfaction levels. We actively encourage our students to engage fully with their student journey, supported by our established Students' Union and benefitting, when required, from our

accessible Disability Services. The Hub provides Careers Advice and Student Finance support for all students as required.

2.5.4 Our students recognise that academic staff can and do go above and beyond to enrich and enhance students' experiences. In this context, staff who organised and led the Law students trip to London were praised as a 'real credit' to the College for their attitude, advice and assistance, and for being excellent in their organisation, motivation and consideration towards others.

2.5.5 Our highly efficient Academic Coaches provide our students with comprehensive wrap-around support including tailored academic support enhanced during this academic year to include further targeted individual and collective support with time management, reflective writing and research skills and through our highly effective GAP (Get Ahead Programme). We also provide additional contextualised induction services and study-check tools for new and existing students accessible within our student VLE. Feedback from our students to their Academic Coaches confirm the outstanding aspects of their services, and include statements such as "*you are the most reliable, intelligent and wise Academic Coach that I have ever met in my life*"; "*Without your help and encouragement, I couldn't have completed my degree and done so well*", "*The academic coaching service has saved my life!*" and the "*experience in 1-to-1 was outstanding*" [021].

2.5.7 This single example encapsulates precisely what we are about as a provider of HE.

**SE6 Physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high-quality teaching and learning.**

2.6.1 Our full-time student satisfaction with our learning resources shows a marked improvement from 73.6% in the first year under review, to 80.1% in the most recent NSS survey, compared to the overall benchmark of 78.2% [007]. Our HE students benefit from our bespoke and modern £14 million University Centre Campus, located at the heart of the Town Centre and home to our wide-ranging portfolio of Higher Education courses. It provides the perfect balance between spaces for teaching and workshops and accessible

support services. We make sure that students and staff have the specific resources required for particular disciplines.

- 2.6.2 For example, our Art and Design Degree students have access to specialist studio spaces dedicated as rooms for illustration and drawing and digital design, bookable edit suites and audio booths and a dedicated, well-resourced final year studio. Law students have the benefit of a room designed as a court room (Moot Court Room), sponsored by Practitioners to facilitate student mooting sessions. Facilities also include expansive classroom and other teaching spaces; a library with a catalogue of books, journals, computers and an accessible restaurant serving hot and cold beverages and food.
- 2.6.3 Virtual resources have been developed and established through our library services, especially post COVID to support and enhance the student experience and accessibility of learning resources. The Library and Learning Resources Team dealt proactively with the constraints of the pandemic, switching purchasing towards digital resources, creating a library guides electronic platform, and turning the library 'help guides' into scannable QR codes. All of these were demonstrably welcomed by the student cohorts concerned.
- 2.6.4 Support for students with specific priorities is designed with multiple access points, beginning with the Disability Advice Services page on the College website [022]. With regard to facilities for our disabled student cohort, we have taken the recommendations of the Department for Education (2019) report on the 'evaluation of disabled students' allowances (DSA), and implemented them. Our dedicated HE Disability Support team also undertake regular DSA student surveys, and communicate back to students the outcomes arising from their feedback, including signs produced to ease access to lifts for wheelchair users; provision of more appropriate lockers for use by students with a disability; and the introduction of regular communications via a newsletter and tweets to keep in touch with the wider cohort of students with a disability.

**SE7 The provider effectively engages with its students, leading to improvements to the experiences and outcomes of its students.**

- 2.7.1 The NSS [007] shows that our students have a four-year average 76.6% satisfaction with the student voice arrangements, which is 1% above benchmark with an underlying trend of increasing satisfaction from 70.7% four years ago to 79.9% in the most recently completed survey. The underpinning split metrics also confirm that students from quintiles with the highest deprivation have a satisfaction level of 78.4%, which is also above benchmark. We received the highest overall student satisfaction rate for the North West with 100% satisfaction across several courses.
- 2.7.2 We are excellent in purposefully partnering with students at governance level with an independent Student Voice Committee composed solely of governing body members [023], and chaired by the Chair of the Corporation Board. Student representatives are also involved in the recruitment of senior officers of the College, and attend monthly meetings where they are

able to share feedback from their peers. Our Student Engagement team ensure authentic consultation with students within a framework of collaborative commitment and partnership. The active work of the Student Voice, Participation and Enrichment Coordinator consistently captures, reviews and acts on student feedback on teaching and learning and other themes across the College.

- 2.7.3 Our dynamic Students' Union is fully committed to engaging students and supporting them during their HE study, as outlined in their Annual Report 2021/22 [024]. Financial support for example, was made available to BA (Hons) Business with Management students to engage in the 'Young Enterprise' initiative resulting in them occupying 4<sup>th</sup> place against 10 other university finalists. Law students were also funded to access the 'Essex Court Mooting' competition providing students with the opportunity to understand and experience the specific challenges involved in a barrister's work of preparing and presenting in Court; and to attend the 'Lincoln's Inn Chambers' annual university information afternoon and dinners for undergraduates interested in becoming barristers.
- 2.7.4 Early Childhood Studies staff arranged a symposium for students in which external experts attended the College to talk to students on areas as diverse as Mental Health in Men; Generational approaches to life and work and specialist infant feeding. Students benefitted from interaction with these specialists, enriching areas directly related to their curriculum.
- 2.7.5 Our determination to ensure that students are able to individually and collectively enhance their learning experiences is evident from the many improvements that have been implemented ranging from adjustments to dietary requirements, improvements to support services, private study spaces and computer and library facilities. Our students actively and fully promote improvements in the different aspects of course delivery through module and programme evaluation and are key agents for ensuring that outcomes are in line with their expectations.

### 3. Student Outcomes

#### 3.1 Positive Outcomes

**SO1 The provider deploys and tailors approaches that are highly effective in ensuring its students succeed in and progress beyond their studies.**

- 3.1.1 The College provides a range of services and facilities which complement the delivery of the teaching, learning and assessment process, and are carefully constructed to be tailored to the individual needs of the College's student cohort.
- 3.1.2 The College-wide student support package is backed by Matrix [025], which is a mandatory assessment process of the quality and delivery of information, advice and guidance (IAG), measured against the four elements of leadership and management; resources; service delivery; and continuous quality improvement. The College was most recently reviewed in 2021, and was successful in attaining the standard in a review which covered reception, call centre, careers, welfare and student advice.



- 3.1.3 There were a number of significant comments and observations within the Matrix report which demonstrate both the effectiveness and the tailored nature of our support services. They felt that our leadership and management within these services remains a strength, with good communication, and clear aims and objectives. The Matrix review also concluded that staff and client (students) views continue to play a significant part in the design and development of IAG services, and that there is 'strong evidence' of the tailoring of IAG sessions for specific curriculum areas, in consultation with curriculum staff. This 'tailoring' is, in the view of the reviewers, a strong enabler for keeping the offer current and topical, which enhances engagement [025].
- 3.1.4 The review also commented favourably on the views of users that the IAG offer is impartial and that this encourages referrals from students and staff alike. Their interviews with students led them to recognise that "there is an army of advocates of the IAG service amongst the student population' [025].
- 3.1.5 The HE curriculum offer is supported and enhanced by a carefully and deliberately designed personal tutor system [026], which is refined annually as part of a cyclical review process, and which has been refreshed and enhanced for the 2022/23 academic year.
- 3.1.6 The personal tutor system is outlined in the Personal Tutor handbook for staff [026] which serves as a guide and a reference for tutors in relation to this role. The personal tutorial calendar ensures consistency across courses and academic teams by detailing the timing of specific group tutorial delivery sessions, and that of individual tutorials. In essence, the first six weeks of each new academic year are focussed on induction activities, and the introduction to study skills sessions, broadening in the second half of the first term to accommodate more personalised sessions, covering both academic and pastoral needs.
- 3.1.7 The pastoral and induction programmes cover areas of vital importance to students, including topics such as Prevent, radicalisation, and mental health, and also interfaces directly with the Careers and Employability Strategy 2022-2024 [027]. There is a clear and direct link between the personal tutors and the academic tutors discussed earlier in this report, and referrals from the former to the latter can arise from the personal tutor process.
- 3.1.8 Reflection on previous iterations of the tutorial plan has identified, based upon learning walks, a series of actions for improvements on the consistency of the tutorial offer, and these have been built into the current personal tutor approach.

**SO2 There are outstanding rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses.**

**SO3 There are outstanding rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses.**

- 3.2.1 These sections have been compiled with data obtained from the document 'Office for Students TEF student outcomes and experience measures'. All data sets are calculated

using the OfS data algorithms as provided and input into our central College information dashboard to calculate the B3 metrics per academic hybrid end year.

### **Continuation and Completion Context**

- 3.2.2 The Office for Students (2022) in the document 'Student Characteristics Data: Student Outcomes' highlights that there are 'distinct patterns between successful outcomes' relating to HE students. The research parallels our own understandings of the demographics of our local area, and provides important context to aid understanding of continuation and completion data. In summary, the College has a much higher proportion of its student cohort who are over 21, from an ethnic minority background, from households with low educational qualifications, and/or from the lowest ABCS quintile.
- 3.2.3 The first and most significant for our College of these OfS findings is that 'students who were over 21 years old in the year they began their studies had lower continuation, completion and attainment rates than students who were under 21 years old'. The College's HE profile is substantially weighted towards the 'over 21' grouping, and in the current academic year (79%) are in that category. The equivalent figure for the academic year 2021/22 was 83%.
- 3.2.4 The completion rate of full-time entrants from a minority ethnic background in 2016/17 was found to be 3.8 percentage points lower than for white students. The current 2022/23 cohort of HE students from such an ethnic background at the College is 25%.
- 3.2.5 The continuation rate of entrants in 2019/20 whose parent(s) did not hold a Higher Education qualification was 3.2 percentage points lower than for students whose parent(s) had a Higher Education qualification. In our case, 50% of our current cohort are from families in this former category.
- 3.2.6 The continuation rate of entrants from ABCS FT continuation quintile 1 in 2019/20 was 11.9 percentage points lower than for students from ABCS FT continuation quintile 5. The completion rate of 2016/17 entrants from ABCS FT completion quintile 1 was 22.1 percentage points lower than for students from ABCS FT completion quintile 5. For the College, 43% of our HE student cohort are from quintile 1 households.

### **Full Time First Degree Students**

- 3.2.7 The data relating to our full-time first degree student cohorts is as follows:

	2018/19 students	2019/20 students	2020/21 students	2021/22 students	OfS Dashboard Average 4 year data	OfS Dashboard Numerical Threshold
Continuation	77%	82%	80%	83%	75.1%	80%
Completion	73%	81%	81%	87%	66.5%	75%
Progression	50%	51%	n/a	n/a	58.8%	60%

3.2.8 This shows a continuous improvement in metrics over the four years, to a position where the College is above threshold for both continuation and completion. This represents an outstanding performance. A slight dip can be seen in 2020/21 for continuation due to the impact of COVID and students leaving to support their families and gain employment. However, this position has been recovered as can be seen from the most recent year.

#### **Part Time First Degree Students**

3.2.9 The data relating to our part-time first degree student cohorts is as follows:

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	OfS Dashboard Average 4 year data	OfS Dashboard Numerical Threshold
Continuation	63%	86%	71%	100%	56.8%	55%
Completion	63%	71%	86%	100%	57.9%	40%
Progression	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	64.9%	65%

3.2.10 This data set is based on very small numbers as we are now able to provide a range of accessible degree and HE courses within a workable format to meet the needs of the local population and demographics of our students. Consequently, part-time study has become less attractive and is declining. A similar dip in continuation was seen in 2020/21 as with full-time first degree students due to the impact of COVID and students needing to support their families with employment. However, as with our full-time cohort, the position was recovered in 2021/22

#### **Other Full Time Undergraduate Degree (Foundation and Higher National)**

3.2.11 The data relating to our other full-time undergraduate degree (Foundation and Higher National) is as follows:

	2018/19 students	2019/20 students	2020/21 students	2021/22 students	OfS Dashboard Average 4 year data	OfS Dashboard Numerical Threshold
Continuation	67%	70%	74%	74%	71.7%	75%
Completion	64%	67%	72%	80%	64.6%	65%
Progression	44%	42%	n/a	n/a	56.6%	45%

3.2.12 The data for these student groups in terms of continuation and completion shows a steady increase in continuation and completion, and the latter in particular is outstanding when compared to benchmark. There is lower progression due to approximately 80% of our Foundation Degree students actually progressing to top up degrees, which only gives three

months at the end of the top up year (12+3 months) to gain graduate level employment before they are surveyed for progression destinations from their courses of study.

### 3.4 Educational Gains

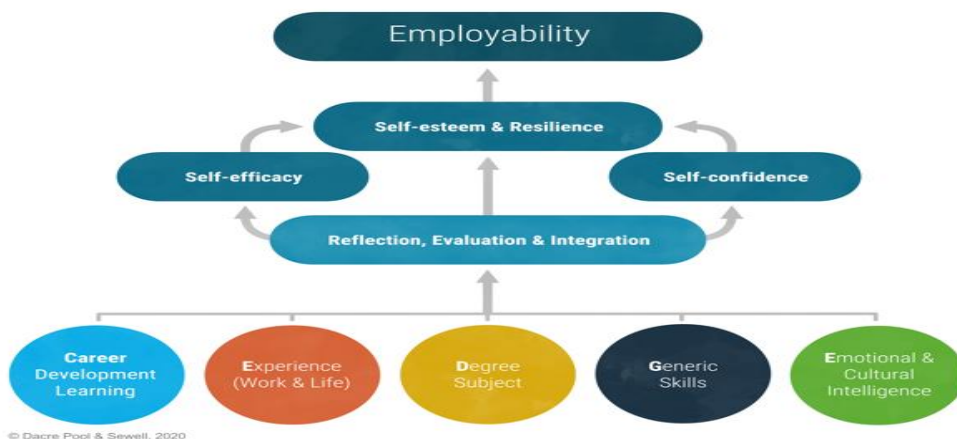
**SO4 The provider clearly articulates the range of educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are highly relevant to its students and their future ambitions.**

- 3.4.1 We realise that the notion of educational gain is embedded in everything we do, starting with gains that our students progressively achieve as they progress through the different levels of study.
- 3.4.2 Our engagement in this submission has given us the opportunity to reflect and confirm that ensuring our students gain educationally has been and continues to be at heart of our HE Strategy, and its implementation and our understandings of what HE teaching excellence are has been expressed above. We have prioritised the notion of educational gain as a key purpose of our HE curriculum generally and as evidenced below, our students have opportunities to achieve and are achieving these gains as they progress through the different levels of study and beyond.
- 3.4.3 Reflective work for this submission allowed us to consolidate, modify and formalise our understandings of what educational gains can and should be, considering our students characteristics and those of the communities they serve and/or plan to serve. We examined literature on the learning gain initiative from (2018) – ‘Lessons in learning gain’ and have contextualised insights from this to confirm our approach to defining educational gain for our students. For our definition of educational gain, we also draw on the Teaching, Learning, Research Programme (TLRP) principles on the power of our course delivery to equip students for life and to understand their educational gains in terms of how they transform during their study; gain intellectually, professionally, socially and personally; and are able to make valuable contributions to the economic and social priorities of their communities (2020). This transformation relates to changes in students’ cognitive, behavioural and affective domains, and to capture and reflect this transformation, we have identified with our students a framework for personal and career development sessions by adopting the Career EDGE model illustrated below. We believe that this model will help our students to capture their progression in all of the above domains leading them to be more self-aware, self-efficient, self-confident and resilient during their studies and beyond. The model has been shared with students and staff, and accepted as an effective way of capturing educational gain. How this model will be applied is discussed further below.

**SO5 The provider's approaches to supporting its students to achieve these gains are evidence-based, highly effective and tailored to its students and their different starting points.**

- 3.5.1 Our strategic approach to educational gain is often related to their final outcomes and potential opportunities that a prestigious award can offer them. They leave us better equipped and educated to navigate through life with skills and attributes they would not have achieved without attending the University Centre. They have knowledge, skills and behaviours that now make them more employable, in better jobs, and motivated to aspire into those previously unachievable possibilities. Their families benefit from a better skilled, and better paid prosperity which aids in their social mobility as a whole family unit, as well as contributing to the socio-economic goals of the wider Place. The student gains in terms of their confidence, self-esteem and social mobility to want to aspire to be better than they previously thought possible.
- 3.5.2 The way we support our students to achieve their educational gains is multi-faceted, and embedded within our teaching, learning and assessment, and student support services, working seamlessly together to achieve the expected educational gains for our students and we have illustrated some of these below. The way we shape the delivery of our courses enables students to continuously engage with opportunities to make these gains. For example, our Criminology students, past and present, were able to contribute to collaborative research with their tutor looking at innovative assessment processes. Workshops for the LLB (Hons) Degree include opportunities for students to gain a sense of realism and to understand the level of competition they will face so that they are fully prepared for life after graduation and include the use of virtual placements which focus on engaging them in simulated tasks which develop their legal knowledge and research and verbal and written communications skills of team work, work-related skills.
- 3.5.3 Our overall approach to developing educational gains for our students recognises the value that students attach to tangible assets they gain from their qualifications and jobs that follow, and is also informed by the Evidencing Value Framework (
- . It supports the development of intangible assets including a sense of belonging, genuine staff, peer and community collaboration, transformative learning, a sense of well-being and satisfaction, and authentic partnerships in shaping their learning and development. We believe this creates productive environments in which wider education gains can be realised. In this respect, relating back to our definition and narrative on recognising such gains by engaging with the Career EDGE + Model which is illustrated below:

### The CareerEDGE+ Model of Graduate Employability



3.5.4 The model generates each of the stages as a lead up to a central key term of employability. Our work is about recognising that none of the bandings employed are static and often the students will bring extensive skills and experiences with them. These can involve the jobs they do, the roles they play in families, households, communities, agencies and organisations. Across these areas, we recognise that we do not engage with people as 'in deficit' or requiring improvement. Instead, we are offering a series of opportunities to add to their skills and to apply graduate-appropriate tools to their growth.

3.5.6 The underlying educational gain that permeates our approach comes in recognising that our students bring enriched lives but that often their values/skills/experiences are not recognised in academia. Through recognising their valuable input and working with this, we have changed the narrative in our area to one of diversity and strength and not deficit.

**SO6 The provider evaluates the gains made by its students, and demonstrates its students are succeeding in achieving the intended gains.**

3.6.1 We prioritise our support for students to make career choices within our Career Strategy which has been developed in line with external frameworks including the eight Gatsby Benchmarks, the Matrix Standards and partnership arrangements with the Lancashire Careers Hub. We monitor our progress against relevant Key Performance Indicators which include targets to monitor and report careers and employability activities for work experience, personal guidance, and contacts with employers, to get at least 60% of

graduates into graduate level employment or further study and review and analyse their impact on student outcomes using achievement and destination data.

- 3.6.2 The following case studies are illustrative examples of the circular view of educational gains, which directly address the needs and aspirations of our students, or some of the most vulnerable people in our Place.

**Case Study 3: Creative Alliance** In 2017, Fine Art developed a partnership agreement with Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council to deliver a contemporary art gallery, off campus in Blackburn. The building was gifted to the College by the Council and the students renovated and established a gallery. This partnership is embedded in Level 5 and Level 6 modules and has seen successive students deliver 68 professional exhibitions and events with funding support from Arts Council England, funded by 'The Creative Alliance'.

**Case Study 5: Inspiring New Directions** Our Engineering cohort has begun to attract more applications from under-represented groups, including females from an Asian or Asian British background. Staff are cited as being inspirational in helping to overcome barriers of self-perception, and cultural barriers, in opening engineering study pathways beyond the traditional male and White British male cohorts. This accords closely with our aims and objectives as a College as an integrative force for our Place.

Provider name: Blackburn College  
UKPRN: 10000747

3.6.3 These examples show how we are meeting the needs of students as individuals, within the broader context of the people and the Place of Blackburn with Darwen, within Pennine Lancashire. We believe these examples, and this submission as a whole, demonstrate that we are a vibrant, successful and outstanding educational institution, playing a pivotal role in preparing our students for their roles in shaping and developing a sustainable Place for today and for the future.

## **Appendix A - Evidence List**

**NB Unless otherwise stated, documents are internal to the College, and available from the College TEF contact**

- 001 HE Strategy
- 002 Partnership Folder
- 003 Ethnicity Census Data. Accessed January 2023. Online at [www.blackburn.gov.uk/lists/downloadabledocuments/ethnicityandreligionprofile2011.pdf](http://www.blackburn.gov.uk/lists/downloadabledocuments/ethnicityandreligionprofile2011.pdf)
- 004 Blackburn Council. People. Accessed January 2023. Online at <https://www.blackburn.gov.uk/facts-and-figures/people/people-outcome-measures>
- 005 FE News. Online at <https://www.fenews.co.uk/skills/university-centre-at-blackburn-college-rated-as-top-in-north-west-for-student-satisfaction/>
- 006 HE Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy
- 007 National Student Survey 2022. Online at <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-information-and-data/national-student-survey-nss/nss-data-provider-level/>
- 008 Annual Monitoring Reviews and Programme Evaluation Questionnaires Folders [2020/21; 2021/22]
- 010 Lancaster University (2020) Revalidation of the Disability and Inclusive Practice Degree
- 011 Ofsted Report for Blackburn College (2022) Online at <https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/31/130736>
- 012 Revalidation documents for the BA (Hons) in Education Studies
- 013 Major amendment documentation for the BSc Honours in Psychology (April 2022)
- 014 Folder of minutes of Committee Meetings (2020/21 and 2021/22)
- 015 Quality Assurance and Support Mechanism folder



Provider name: Blackburn College

UKPRN: 10000747

016 Example of curriculum development consultation with Employers – BSc in Engineering

017 Scholarship Framework 2022

019 Organisational Development Plan

020 Organisational Development Annual Report 2021/22

022 Disability Advice Services Folder

023 Independent Student Voice Committee folder

024 Students' Union Annual Report 2021/22

025 Matrix individual assessment report 2021

026 Personal Tutor system folder

027 Careers and Employment Strategy 2022-2024

## Appendix B – Bibliography

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