

NCG 2023 TEF Submission

UKPRN: 10004599

About Us

The NCG higher education (HE) community brings together our staff, students, alumni and partners to provide life-changing opportunities for individuals that strengthen and shape the places they live and work. We are an ambitious organisation with a unique proposition that embraces the further and higher Education sectors, delivered across a national footprint.

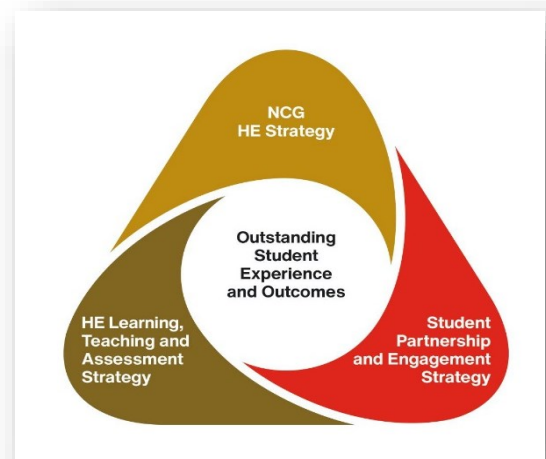
Our **mission** is to deliver exceptional education to create transformative opportunities for individuals that strengthen the prosperity of their local communities. In turn this enables us to realise our **vision** of being the UK's leading provider of higher technical education through our inclusive approach, local impact, national influence and reach.

We have awarded NCG Foundation Degrees since 2011 and NCG Honours and master's degrees since 2016. The first further education institution in the UK to be granted Taught Degree Awarding Powers.

Although we are a national college group we very much operate as 'One NCG' ensuring outstanding experiences and outcomes for all students wherever the study location. Our institution is made up of seven colleges spread across the country each focussed on inspiring excellence, sparking curiosity and making a real impact on our students and our local communities. Higher education is offered at a four of these colleges: Newcastle College University Centre (NCUC), Carlisle College, Kidderminster College, and Southwark College (small ITE provision only). NCUC (one of the largest providers of HE in FE in the UK) also has specialist satellite sites which deliver outstanding higher technical education. These are: the Newcastle Aviation Academy (at Newcastle Airport), the Rail Academy, and the Energy Academy. NCG currently has one collaborative partner, the Organisational Learning Centre (OLC), who deliver Level 6 Top-up programmes in Bolton, Manchester, Oldham and London.

Strategies

We have three core strategies which drive outstanding student experience and outcomes. Firstly, the **NCG HE Strategy** [1] which was developed collaboratively with our students, staff body, governors and business. It sets a clear direction for our HE provision and reflects NCG's strategic direction: widening of access, enabling social mobility, and success in terms of economic prosperity and personal development. Secondly, our **HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy** [2] which gives clear focus on how NCG students engage with their studies, what outstanding teaching on our programmes 'looks and feels' like and the excellent quality of resources and continued investment to enable our students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies. Finally, our **Student Partnership and Engagement Strategy** [3] celebrates the principle of students as active agents involved in their learning, in the production of knowledge, and as equal partners in our higher education community.



Students in Partnership

We advocate student empowerment through transformative teaching and learning, student experiences, along with the positive impact higher education has on an individual's life-choices and prosperity. Critically, our co-created technical and highly vocational curriculum (incorporating enterprise and entrepreneurship) prepares our students to meet skills challenges now and, in the future, and nurtures civic pride for the places we serve.

We champion student agency in enhancing learning and the wider student experience (examples are highlighted throughout this document) having moved beyond the traditional student engagement model of simply listening to 'student voice' through surveys and evaluations. The three core values of our student partnership ethos are respect, reciprocity, and shared responsibility. We provide an environment of trust, empowerment, inclusivity, honesty and curiosity.

Our award winning [4] Student Fellowship programme has six excellent project themes, and is widely presented as exemplar across the sector, for example at RAISE conferences [5]. Each academic year we recruit over one hundred paid 'student fellows' [6] to lead and collaborate on projects across: individual colleges, subject areas, or with diverse groups of students, for example our '360 project' which involves our BAME, disabled and LGBTQ+ communities. This project links directly to our institutional Equality, Diversity, Belonging and Inclusion (EDIB) Strategy, further committing to the aim of being an open, welcoming and caring place that inspires excellence through exceptional education [58].

Widening Access to Higher Education

In contrast to the majority of the HE sector in England, 97% our students are commuter students [7]. Critically, upon successful completion of their studies, our students remain within their regions securing highly skilled work and playing a vital role within their local economy [8]. Our strong commitment to access, participation and progression gives the opportunity for students, the majority of whom have historically been underserved by society and who are underrepresented in higher education, to thrive in their studies with us, and beyond.

We take great pride in enabling students who would not otherwise access higher education by providing an alternative, individualised and supported route through higher education to skilled employment. For example, our cohorts [9]:

- have significantly more students from the most deprived areas of England as identified by Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintiles 1 and 2 when compared to the sector. Our cohort averages at 58% from these quintiles, which is 27% above the sector average;
- have significantly more students from the lowest wards of participation using the TUNDRA Middle-layer Super Output Area (MSOA) measure when compared to the sector. Our cohort averages at 46% from these wards, which is 23% above the sector average;
- 60% of our students have qualifications on entry which are either BTECs (below DDM), HE access awards or they are mature students with few known qualifications. This is 100% more than the sector average.
- have significantly more mature students when compared to the sector with 50% being mature students (21+ at point of entry), which is 28% above sector average;
- have significantly more students declaring a disability than the sector with 21% declaring a disability, which is 6% above sector average;
- 78% of our students balance employment and their studies

This submission demonstrates how our outstanding teaching, support and student experience enables success for these underrepresented students.

NCG Curriculum

Our curriculum model is based on our relational and inclusive teaching approach, which is predicated on small class sizes, providing outstanding support for students and is highly technical and vocational. We offer mainly one- and two-year programmes, Cert HE's, Foundation Degrees and one-year Honours Top Ups across 19 curriculum areas. [10]



I love NCG. I'm happy to do my foundation degree here; the teachers respond really fast and are always there to help. My tutors listen to my concerns and guide me on where to go. The support system here is very positive. My learning experience is excellent. I am learning a lot, it is challenging for me but I'm gaining loads of knowledge and skills.

STUDENT COMMENT, NSS 2022

Our student community



We believe that employer engagement, the enhancement of teaching and learning, and students' employability are inextricably linked. Involvement of employers as part of the design and delivery of the curriculum is therefore considered central to enhancing and supporting student employability and workforce development.



Course content and employer engagement (SE2, SE3, SO1)

As a forward-looking anchor institution with a strong civic commitment, we collaborate with employer forums (also convening termly industry advisory boards in each curriculum area with representatives from employers, PSRBs and subject specialists), local authorities, chambers of commerce and Local Enterprise Partnerships co-creating a rich curriculum offer. This collaborative approach between business and curriculum is award winning, as demonstrated by our 2019 and 2020 Educate North Awards (awarded in 2021 due to the pandemic) in the field of Business Collaboration and Partnership in the HE in FE Sector [11].

Employability and work readiness are pivotal to our curriculum design. All programmes are inextricably linked to employment and mapped to occupational standards, professional statutory regulatory body requirements (where applicable), practical skill development and embed the application of both theory and practise to work contexts. Our programmes are highly technical and vocational and enable students to apply their knowledge, understanding skills and behaviours in real-work scenarios and placements. An outstanding feature of our foundation degree programmes is two specific modules which support students with progression into highly skilled employment. These are Work Related Learning, studied at level four, and Work Based Learning, studied at level five.

“ ” *Excellent links with industry to incorporate our needs into the programme (Employer representative, FdEng Engineering Validation Event, 03/05/22)[12]*

“ ” *Module content is innovative and vocationally relevant to the sector enabling students to develop the skills needed in industry (Industry representative, FdSc Integrated Health, Social Care and Well-Being Validation Event, 20/05/22).*

Our programmes are developed in conjunction with leading regional and national employers (for example: Accenture, British Airways, Catapult, Crowne Plaza, Dynamo Creative Learning, Newcastle United Foundation, Port of Blyth, Virgin Money) to maximise employability skills behaviours and attributes and progression opportunities which is pivotal to our students' experience. Our validation process stretches beyond basic expectations to ensure students are provided with outstanding opportunities and experiences.

“ ” *Technical content was well put and great, teaching was outstanding, with the learning experience far better than anywhere else (Student comment, NSS 2021).*

“ ” *Teachers have a lot of external knowledge from their time in the industry outside of college time. This really benefits the lessons as the lessons and topics can be translated well into real-world scenarios which makes lessons fully engaging for pupils (Student comment, NSS 2022).*

We design programmes and tailor teaching approaches to bring students and employers together to provide experiential learning opportunities, for example:


- Through our OfS project titled Stay and Succeed North East (SASNE), funded through the OfS Challenge Competition: industrial strategy and skills (see SASNE), we created 12-month engineering apprenticeships with North-East employers. 82% of students successfully achieved full-time employment in the North-East engineering industry on completion of their programme [13].
- Industry 'takeovers' are standard practice within our curriculum. Here we utilise our strong links with employers to deliver sessions and workshops to students throughout a module. These 'takeovers' demonstrate specialist key skills and techniques to our students which provides experiential learning excellence from theory into practice.
- As part of their critical understanding of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions level 5 Counselling students work with local counselling practices to support community groups. This aspect of their programme provides students with real-work experience and industry links.

Authentic assessment is a core assessment tool experienced by NCG students, which uses live briefs from employers with real-time workflows and industry standard deadlines to provide innovative solutions to the challenges that businesses currently face [14]. This practice builds self-confidence, personal skills and ensure students meet industry standards and expectations. Assessment within our real work environments replicates real-world business problems set in a professional context which then enhances real-world experience.

“ ” *The course has been insightful and the perfect introduction to the industry. Providing all the skills needed to be prepared for a job. The work and teachers make the course (Student comment 2022 NSS).*

 ***Love the live briefs from employers embedded in the programme, these will provide your students with authentic assessments that they will receive in industry (Employer representative, BSc (Hons) Computing Validation Event 07/06/2022).***

We have numerous industry-standard real-working environments (RWEs) and simulation suites across NCG, which include: The Retreat (spa), sports clinics, counselling & therapeutic suites, health simulation suites, travel agents, a 200-seat theatre, dance studios, recording suites, aircraft (Aviation Academy), restaurants, rail tracks and carriages (Rail Academy). Students hone their technical skills in these immersive environments, applying theory to practice in readiness to thrive in their chosen field of work.

 ***I love that so many of our teachers are industry professionals. We have state of the art facilities. Our class sizes are small, leaving good time for feedback. I enjoy the variety that we are taught. We can apply our skills to life after college e.g., building a rep file (Student comment, NSS 2021).***

All NCG curriculum areas have active employer advisory boards which meet termly to ensure a contemporary curriculum which is industry-informed to ensure our students are immersed in the knowledge, skills and behaviours required by employers and undertake rich work experiences [15] which enable them to showcase their talents and secure employment within their chosen career. We also have transnational opportunities with Erasmus and Turing projects which enhance the student experience [16] providing further development in a global context.

Here are some examples of business-solution focussed projects across our institution which prepare our student body for employment:

- Art and Design students collaborated on a weeklong major live project with Haus and HMC Rotterdam / Amsterdam, which was instrumental in giving the students an insight into their chosen career industry.
- Digital Arts students worked on business solutions and projects with Ryton Infant and Junior School Federation, Anxious Minds (Counselling and Support Services), The Great North Children's Hospital (which won the Project of the Year award, Dynamites 22 North East IT and Technology Awards [17]), and Daft as a Brush (Cancer Patient Care).
- BA (Hons) Creative Industry students engage in live theatrical performances, working with industry specialists, networking, external theatres, and local artists. Students develop their knowledge and skills outside of their programme content, such as stage management and lighting.
- Music and Performing Arts students engage in workshops with: ManPower, Michael Fitsimmons, Mike Platt delivering Front of House and Monitoring, Drew Michael and Dean Thompson from Sam Fender, local Promoter Anth Thompson.
- Business and Animal Management students work with West Midlands Safari Park on marketing and providing creative solutions for business focussed animal care projects.

Our student learning opportunities data is outstanding. In the 2022 NSS 'Learning Opportunities' was significantly above OfS benchmark (86.5% against a benchmark of 80%).

 ***The course is interesting, and I've learned lots of new skills to support me in industry (Student comment, NSS 2021).***

 ***I am able to work within the industry and with practitioners (Student comment, NSS 2019).***

Over the last four years programme teams have had access to a budget to fund initiatives for students studying Level 4 and 5, the Study Ready Guarantee (SRG) and Work Ready Guarantee (WRG) respectively. These initiatives allow for programme teams to enrich the student experience with activities to better prepare students for their studies and for employment. Activities provided for students included: training courses, specialist equipment, books, trips, and dedicated facilities [18].




Learning resources (SE6)

To continue to offer an outstanding teaching and learning experience to all students, we are continuing to make significant investment in our learning resources. As a testament to this, our NSS satisfaction scores for learning resources have improved over the last four years, with our full-time metric demonstrating a 1.4% increase and part-time improving by 20%. Of all our student cohorts our BAME students are most happy with the learning resources. For this group satisfaction is 3.3% above the sector average and 4.9% above benchmark.

During the COVID-19 pandemic as part of our rapid shift to digital pedagogies, an additional £4m of resources was invested specifically quickly to enhance student access to, and experience of, digital teaching and learning and to support emergency remote study. We also surveyed our students at various intervals throughout lockdown to find out about their online learning experiences and provided lap-top loans to over 120 students, bought specialist software licenses for home use (specifically benefitting our engineering, digital technologies and digital arts students), provided access to adapted IT suites for those with no suitable home working spaces (as soon as allowed), and also provided extensive training (minimum weekly) on digital pedagogies for all of our teaching staff. However, along with most HE institutions, our student feedback on learning resources was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns. However, following our decision to return to present-in-person teaching as soon as restrictions allowed, it was positive to see that our NSS Learning Resource metric significantly improved by 6.1% between 2021 and 2022.

Co-creation and listening to our student's expectations is core to our resource investment. For example, the student feedback on learning resources captured in our student forums and student voice activity mainly relates to Wi-Fi connection speeds. As a result of this we have made substantial investment in our Wi-Fi infrastructure across all colleges.

 ***Wi-Fi on campus has got better since I was in FE, it's a bit slow for tik Tok and Facebook but I can access everything I need for my course (Student comment, Student Partnership and Engagement Committee, 2022)***

Across our colleges we prioritise Wi-Fi bandwidth for our curriculum and when our students are asked about satisfaction with course-specific resources "question 20: I have been able to access course-specific resources e.g. equipment, facilities, software, collections" in the NSS, the results highlight a 14.3% improvement from 2021 and our students are highly satisfied.

As a learning organisation the views of all of our students throughout their learning journey is hugely important. Therefore, alongside the NSS we use our Higher Education Student Survey (HESS) for all students not in the NSS target list, which mirrors the NSS timeframe and questions. In this survey we have seen a positive increase in student satisfaction with learning resources from 80% satisfaction in 2020 (79% response rate from 1716 students) to 85% in 2022 (70% response rate from 1607 students), which is 5 percentage points above OfS benchmark [19].

Outstanding digital and physical learning is a key strand of our NCG Strategy [20] and ‘resources’ (both digital and physical) is therefore a standing item across all our deliberative structure including at HE Academic Board (chaired by our CEO), HE Governance Committee (also attended by our CEO) and Learning Teaching and Enhancement Committee (chaired by the Director of Higher Education). We have aligned our resources investment with Michael Barber’s Gravity Assist Report (Feb 21) investing in digital learning resources to complement our in-person delivery and independent study, providing authentic assessments where students can access industry standard equipment or software and streamlining our technologies for accessibility and compatibility with industry. As outlined in our HE strategy, we provide outstanding industry-standard curriculum resources which enable our students to develop their technical and vocational skills in preparation for meaningful employment. Our Employer Advisory Boards guide capital funding bids along with student and teacher feedback along with a specific ‘Learning Resources Fellowship Project’ (2 students) working with student groups to co-create bids and influence our decision making. We make annual investments in our learning resources through our ‘Capital Bids’ process [21].


“Facilities and equipment are brilliant and up-to-date (Student comment, NSS 2019).


“Facilities for musical theatre course were amazing. Really lucky to have these facilities and the opportunities to work with other students was amazing, cannot fault (Student comment, NSS 2020).

The table below outlines our investment on IT infrastructure, investment in curriculum delivery and upgrading our estate from 2018.

NCG Capital Expenditure (all figures in £'000s)	2022	2021	2020	2019	2018
IT infrastructure and systems	859	1,794	2,228	1,377	774
Curriculum delivery	2,060	320	358	769	2,872
Upgrades to property, plant and equipment	1,201	3,110	597	664	578
Total	5,034	5,224	3,183	2,810	4,224


We have made significant investment in STEM resources including our £2.8million Capital Funding Plan, part funded through the 2021 OfS Capital Competition Fund, to ensure we have the resources to continue offering outstanding teaching and learning facilities [22]. The plan enables talent development for the four areas of strategic regional importance (advanced manufacturing, health & life sciences, energy, and digital) and is aligned to our NCG Strategy. Examples of purchased learning resources include: a subsea remote operated vehicle (Energy students), electric vehicle (Energy students), 3D industrial printer (Engineering students), 4 metre 3D Powerwall for interacting with 3D models (Digital Technology students), transportable virtual reality solution (Digital students), ground instructional aircraft (Aircraft maintenance students).

 ***We have a large variety of studios which specialise in different things such as print room or CAD, repro and laser cutters these have helped with our skills development (Student comment, NSS 2022).***

 ***Being able to work with machinery from industry and use industry techniques (CNC, laser cutter, 3D printing) has helped me to further myself (Student comment, NSS 2019).***

In 2022 we were awarded £5.8m from the OfS Capital funding competition through the single bidding exercise. This bid focussed on the refurbishment of our estate and the installation and purchase of infrastructure and equipment to establish two HE Technical Hubs across two high-cost subject areas of strategic regional importance namely: Digital technology at Carlisle College and NCUC; and Construction, Engineering & Energy at Carlisle College, Kidderminster College and NCUC. This investment will enable students to continue to refine their technical skills with state-of-the-art resources, developing skills now that are needed for 2024 and beyond.

 ***The equipment available for use is amazing. And being able to use them effectively has definitely helped with getting assignments in on time (Student comment, NSS 2022).***

 ***Excellent support with technology had been provided during lockdown (Student feedback, OLC Townhall, June 2020)***




Teaching, Assessment and Feedback (SE1, SE3, SO1 SO2)

Our Teachers: NCG's outstanding teaching is delivered by highly trained 'dual-professionals' who have moved into teaching from industry with many, particularly in the creative arts and performance areas, still active in their industry [23]. As a result, all our teaching staff are fully qualified teachers (or currently working towards their awards) and have relevant sector/industry expertise. This means they are highly effective in supporting our students' learning, as evidenced by our outstanding continuation metric in the most recent year. This is not only in terms of the skills and attributes required for graduate work, but critically, in the development of our students' pre-professional identities (Jackson, 2016) [24]. This ensures that when seeking their first graduate job NCG graduates can 'think, act and feel' like a technician, engineer, healthcare worker, fashion designer etc. (Jackson, 2016) [24].

Teaching staff are required to provide a written reflection of their understanding of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) and how it relates to their own teaching practice. Those new to teaching HE are provided with an experienced HE mentor during their first year. Our HE teachers are also required to undertake an annual reflective training needs assessment mapped to the UKPSF as outlined in our 'HE Continuous Professional Development Strategy 2021-24' [25]. This ensures an outstanding learning experience for our students embedding excellent higher education teaching, feedback and assessment practices throughout programme delivery.

To monitor and enhance teaching practice all teachers across NCG receive a minimum of one teaching and learning observation per year, this is in addition to regular class visits and learning walks [26]. Teaching observations are carried out by fully trained teaching, learning and assessment

coaches and managers. Peer to peer observation is used to share best practice and enhance teaching and learning practice within curriculum areas.

 *The relationship between the tutors and the students is amazing. They really get to know you and seem to genuinely care about you. It makes the whole process so much better and amazing because they are able to give you specific advice while taking into account your personal life and how you're generally feeling (Student comment, NSS 2021).*

Learning Teaching and Assessment (LTA) Strategy: Our LTA strategy is informed by evidence-based practice and a thorough review of the contemporary literature on 'good' and/or 'effective' teaching, learning and assessment. We have used external reference points including: OfS Gravity Assist, OfS 2020 annual review, DfE 2021 Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth, QAA Quality Code B3, Advance HE Enhancing Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, and the UK Professional Standards Framework. Considering our purpose, our students, the literature and the reference points (above) we believe that firstly, inclusion and belonging, and secondly, transformation and engagement, are critical pillars for outstanding teaching, learning and assessment. Adhering to these principles ensures that we focus on creating the right environment to maximise learning for all our students and leads to outstanding rates of student continuation as evidenced in our TEF year four continuation metric.

The key LTA themes are:

- HE as a transformational experience – enabling students to transition from 'one world to another – a turning point' (Fotiadou, 2020) [27]
- Curiosity, excitement, and collaboration are key (Nugent et al., 2019) [28]
- Importance of inclusion, belonging and student-centredness in LTA (Thomas, 2020) [29]
- The importance of relational teaching and learning (Walker-Gleaves, 2019) [30]

The success of all students is our priority with inclusivity and belonging embedded throughout all aspects of student learning. This enables our diverse cohorts, including those from non-traditional and underrepresented groups, to succeed in higher education and to graduate to work in roles that enhance the quality of their own lives and enabling social mobility.

Ethos of Belonging and Inclusion: With our heterogenous student body, we believe it is critical for engagement and success that all our students feel included in our learning community and that they feel like they 'belong'. In March 2020, when teaching pivoted on-line almost overnight due to the pandemic, we launched a teaching initiative called 'Making Connections' [31]. With the purpose of encouraging teaching staff to establish strong, relational connections with all their students (despite remote delivery) in order to maximise student engagement and support mental health. The campaign was based on the 'seven exemplifiers of caring pedagogies' (Walker-Gleaves, 2019) [30]. These exemplifiers include: listening and empathy; scaffolding and support; active pedagogies; feedback and praise; active concern in the personal lives of students; and critically (for student success), having high expectations (in terms of student work and behaviours). The engagement from the teaching staff has been key to this initiative as they spend the most time (of all staff in the organisation). Our staff use these relational pedagogies to spark curiosity and excitement, and, in turn, this invokes emotional investment and motivation in the students (Nugent et al., 2019) [28].

The success of this relational teaching model is exemplified firstly, in our strong continuation metric which improved 12% over the four-year period and is 3% above benchmark in the most recent year

and secondly with our outstanding levels of student satisfaction i.e. for the scale ‘teaching on my course’ over the last three years there has been an 8.7% improvement in the distance to benchmark.

Teaching on my course	Indicator	Benchmark Value	Distance to benchmark
Year 1 (earliest)	84.8%	85.2%	-0.4%
Year 2	82.8%	85.0%	-2.3%
Year 3	84.7%	81.9%	2.8%
Year 4 (most recent)	88.7%	82.3%	6.4%
Overall	85.3%	83.5%	1.8%



All of my tutors have been exceptional in making the course interesting, challenging, and enjoyable. They are always supportive and happy to answer questions or clarify things when needed so things are clear in preparation for assessment. They always respond to email and messages in a timely manner and have shown that they genuinely care for each student and their progression by carefully listening to and acting on feedback efficiently. Their own passion for the subject definitely comes through during their teaching, which makes it stimulating and encourages us to put in the effort to do well. I would like to offer a massive thank you to all of them for re-igniting my love of learning and for all of their help towards my development in achieving my goals! I cannot commend them enough and would definitely recommend my course to anyone! (Student comment, NSS 2022).

Our commitment to the importance of relational pedagogies also shaped our principle-based decision to return as many of our students to campus for present-in-person teaching as quickly and safely as possible following lockdown. We remain fully committed to present-in-person teaching across all our campuses for all our programmes.

Assessment: In 2018-19 we launched our Inclusive Assessment project to: increase the accessibility of assessment, provide every student with an equal opportunity to demonstrate their achievement, support engagement with assessment [32]. The project has resulted in 100% of NCG programmes incorporating assessment choice for at least one module, for example students can choose between a presentation or a portfolio. Student feedback on this tailored approach to assessment has been extremely positive in terms of student learning and attainment [33].

Our programmes incorporate innovative approaches to assessment which support our students' learning, progression, and attainment [34, 35]. Examples include:

- Poster conferences: annually students from level 6 BSc engineering programmes present poster assessments at our Engineering Student Showcase event held at the Discovery Museum (Science and Engineering) in Newcastle. This event brings employers from across the North and students from a range of engineering and energy programmes together and celebrates student achievement and engineering employment in the North-East of England. We also raise aspirations as part of this event by including our FE engineering and science cohorts.
- Cross curricula integration: students from our BA (Hons) Advanced Skin Techniques collaborate with our BA (Hons) Photography students to complete an integrated assessment where both sets of students are assessed individually but work together on an experiential learning opportunity to provide business solutions for a local employer.

- Industry takeover – FdA Culinary Arts students have a ‘takeover’ day at the Copthorne Hotel in Newcastle where they run all aspects of the hotel services which forms part of their module assessment and involves the reflections of the hotel staff and supervisors on the student performance.
- Work-based learning – as part of a shared module delivered across NCG foundation degree programmes, students are provided with ‘real-work’ assessment briefs and real-work problem-scenarios as part of their module assessments, e.g., creation of a new business.

Feedback: Constructive, purposeful and impactful feedback is an essential element for the progress and development of all students. Our staff provide feedback timely (within 20 working days), and use our AIMS approach (Achievement, Improvement, Moving forward, and Spelling punctuation and Grammar) [36]. This approach has been widely commended by external examiners, employers, and external educational bodies as being innovative, supportive and tailored to students and their needs, allowing them to develop and progress.

“The feedback provided to students is exceptional and above standard. I feel that the model (Achievement, Improvements, Moving Forward and Spelling Punctuation and Grammar) really provides a deep and detailed account of the marking and provides students with a wealth of key points, (1) to celebrate their success and (2) to help them improve in the future, this is standardised across all modules and is appreciated. Feedback is robust, detailed and allows students to take the points forward in to further study and or industry (External Examiner report, FdSc Games Technologies, 2021).

We also utilise audio and video feedback for students. Many of our students prefer this personalised approach. We have conducted collaborative research projects on audio feedback to collate student feedback, share responses and create best practice guidance [37]. Our approach to feedback compliments our pedagogies of care ethos and teaching staff are always available to discuss assessment feedback and support students to develop their assessments.

“We have a lot of one-to-one learning or small group learning opportunities, which help us to understand and get feedback on our work as we go. We get given lots of experiences with live briefs and work placements (Student comment, NSS 2022)

Our outstanding assessment and feedback practice is further evidenced by our NSS metric where we are significantly above benchmark overall demonstrating outstanding quality, and in the most recent year within the top quartile in England and 9.4% above benchmark.

Assessment and Feedback	Indicator	Benchmark Value	Distance to benchmark
Year 1 (earliest)	84.8%	79.7%	5.1%
Year 2	79.0%	79.8%	-0.8%
Year 3	81.7%	76.4%	5.3%
Year 4 (most recent)	85.4%	76.1%	9.4%
Overall	82.8%	77.9%	4.9%



Scholarship and professional practice (SE3, SE4)

Our approach to Research and Scholarly Activity (RSA) draws on Boyer's (1996) model of scholarship: discovery, integration, engagement, learning and teaching. This is enacted through our RSA Strategy and annual college implementation plans [38]. We enhance teaching and learning through research-informed teaching and scholarship. Through this approach we ensure that all our teaching staff engage in scholarship through their discipline and the vocational requirements of the courses they teach as well as through their own professional teaching practice. The framework we use outlines NCG's RSA expectations regarding:

- a. **Enhancing teaching and learning** – through research-informed course design and teaching. Alongside engaging in research activity to inform teaching and learning, staff are encouraged to engage with the pedagogic development of their discipline through professional networking, professional memberships, sector publications and teacher networks.
- b. **Supporting staff with research and scholarly activity** - through CPD opportunities and masterclasses, 1/3 of staff currently have HEA fellowships (with 15 to 20 going through the process each year), funding for masters and doctorates for dual professional staff to enhance teaching and learning. Subject-specific and educational scholarship is a priority at NCG and we are committed to investing in our own staff to enhance the student experience.
- c. **Supporting students as partners** – as evidenced in the Student Engagement section.
- d. **Engaging with external bodies and externalising research outputs** – We invest in our staff to enhance knowledge and teaching practice by providing funding for research outputs, subject specific training and development, and higher-level study (Masters and Doctorates). Staff also use their collaborative experiences from other institutions (e.g. external examiner tenures, external advisor positions), to reflect and enhance their own practice and that of their colleagues.

Our staff produce academic publications and present at conferences (typically to share and disseminate findings from student centered projects). Indicative examples include:

- Bradley, G., Philips, T. (student researcher) and Turnbull, N. (Director of Higher Education (2022). 'Identity, vulnerability and psychological safety' Advance HE Teaching & Learning Conference (July 22)
- Brown, A. (2022). How the Development of 11 Inclusive Employability Skills Led to Effectively Embedding Employability into Undergraduate Modules. AdvanceHE Employability Symposium. Birmingham.
- Clarkson, M. and Murray, D. J. (student researcher) (2019). Developing Audio Feedback: A Collaborative Study between Two North East Colleges. Assessment in Higher Education Conference.
- Costello, R. and Lambert, M. (2019). Motivational Influences for Higher Education (HE) Students. International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design, Vol. 9 (1).
- Dunn, S. (2019). Lessons From a Developmental Evaluation: Perceptions of Teaching Practice Feedback From Further Education Initial Teacher Education. Association of Colleges (AoC) College HE Research and Scholarship Conference.

- Fernandes, L. (2019). Could a Focus on Ethics of Caring Within Teacher Education Have the Potential to Reduce the Exclusion of Autistic Students. Association of Colleges (AoC) College HE Research & Scholarship Conference.
- Ismael, H., Appiah, D. and Panditharathna, R. (2022). Impact of Informal Learning Environments On Active Learning in Higher Education. Proceeding of the 7th Interdisciplinary Conference of Management Researchers, Sri Lanka.
- Morantes-Africano, L. (2017). Teachers' Digital Skills Development in ITT: Apps for e-TLA. The Active Learning Network Conference (University of Essex).
- Robertson, E. (2022). How Do Foundation Level Art and Design Students Define Creativity - A Reflexive Thematic analysis. London Conference in Critical Thought (University of London).
- Rogerson, M. (2019). The Challenges of a Body-Centric Research Project. Association of Colleges (AoC) College HE Research & Scholarship Conference.
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Our RSE team won the 2020 'Research Team of the Year' award at the Educate North Awards having been 'runners up' in 2019 awards [4]. This award (delayed until 2021) recognised the unique and ground-breaking work of the team as the majority of others shortlisted for this category were research-focussed universities.

In 2019 we developed an NCG Research Portal [39]. Promoting scholarly activity and student engagement initiatives and projects with students and staff. The Research Portal:

- Improves accessibility, acting as a central point where all research information can be accessed.
- Celebrates the work of staff engaging in research evoking a sense of pride at being showcased.
- Improves the external visibility and reach of our research, which aligns with our vision 'to be the UK's leading college group recognised for our local impact, national influence and reach' and positions NCG as a leader of research in our sector (HE in FE).
- Outlines our position as a leading provider of HE in FE with a unique collaborative research proposition for students.
- Provides students with further information on how to engage in research beyond their programme of study, which models 'what is possible' for students who may otherwise feel research is beyond their remit.

We hosted the 2019 Association of Colleges North Conference at Newcastle College University Centre. Over 100 delegates from the sector other institutions attended the event where academics and teaching staff shared and discussed innovative and effective teaching and learning strategies,

best workshop/classroom practice, and to further enhance communities of research and scholarly activity within college based higher education.

In 2021 we created the 'College Higher Education Action Research Group' (CHEARG) to further enhance practice through research and reflection. Staff from across NCG come together to discuss and engage in action research projects which would contribute to an outstanding academic experience for our students. This group evolved from the 'North East College Teaching and Research Network' (NECTAR) for which NCG staff were founding members [40]. NECTAR had previously (2018-2021) been a forum to share and develop research and innovation. CHEARG provides opportunities for NCG staff to engage in Research and Scholarly Activity (RSA), including action research projects, and delivers a platform for the sharing of best practice and dissemination. Currently there are 21 members of the group from across NCG.



Support for Students (SE5, SO1, SO2)

We cultivate outstanding, supportive, learning environments for all our students. Our students can access a range of tailored support service teams including: academic support, wellbeing, mitigation, pastoral support, student 'at risk' monitoring and support process, financial support, alternative assessment, SEND (i.e., inclusion plans). Our tailored approach reflects the needs of our students, and we strive to ensure that every student feels an appropriate balance of support and challenge in their learning.



The support is absolutely amazing on an intellectual and emotional level. All of the staff make a conscious effort to get to know students on an individual basis and ensure their needs are met as well as their wants (Student comment, NSS 2022).

The 2022 NSS satisfaction score for the academic support scale was 86%, which was 4% above our 2021 result. Our students indicate high levels of satisfaction with the support provided. Indicative examples from the 2022 NSS include:

- Q12. 'I have been able to contact staff when I needed to' improved by 3% in 2021 to 88%.
- Q13. 'I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course' improved by 7% in 2021 to 86%.
- Q14. 'Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course' improved by 6% in 2021 to 85%.

In our 2022 internal survey (HESS), student satisfaction with the academic support scale across NCG was 95% (70% response rate from 1607 students), an improvement of 3% from 2021 (82% response rate from 1725 students), which evidences our outstanding support for students [19].



The entire structure, delivery and support we get from tutors are second to none! I started Level 4 with no academic skills, but through the amazing support of the coaches and staff my academic abilities have improved so much by listening to feedback received (Student comment, NSS 2022).

The distance between our NSS Academic Support scale benchmark and metric has increased by 6.2% and is an outstanding quality feature in years three, four and overall.

Academic Support	Indicator	Benchmark Value	Distance to benchmark
Year 1 (earliest)	84.9%	84.4%	0.5%
Year 2	84.7%	84.4%	0.3%
Year 3	82.1%	78.4%	3.6%
Year 4 (most recent)	86.3%	79.6%	6.7%
Overall	84.4%	81.6%	2.9%

The NCG Academic Support Team (AST), comprises of six Academic Support Coaches and an overall Coordinator. This team was formed in 2017, and, in providing opportunities for differentiated and comprehensive support to all our students across NCG, has been one of the enablers for NCG's outstanding continuation rates. Student engagement with this service has grown year-on-year, with 363 students receiving support in 20-21, and 480 in 21-22 [41]. The AST approach to academic learning support goes beyond simple skill development or improving writing, specifically focusing on developing students' reflective and reflexive abilities through coaching techniques to enable transformative outcomes. In 21-22, 73% of self-referrals (350 students) cited low confidence as the primary reason for seeking support, therefore team practice is rooted in Egan and Reece's (2020) coaching and mentoring theory and the 'Skilled Helper' framework.



Adapted from McGrath and Bates 2017

Students are invited to provide feedback on their academic support. In 21-22, 121 students provided feedback from the 362 that received the Academic Support Feedback Form [42]. 93% of the students felt that the academic support they had received was excellent. 99% of them would recommend the academic support to other students.

“It’s helped me massively, not having done any academic writing in three years
(Student comment, Academic Support Feedback Form 2022).

“Academic support has helped me feel far more confident in my academic writing skill. Provided support has really helped guide me through writing a high-quality dissertation
(Student comment, Academic Support Feedback Form 2022).

The below table highlights impact the AST have made over the past two years to support continuation and completion.

Academic support team impact		
Percentage of students who interact with the team and:	2020-21	2021-22
At award level – do not pass the award	2.6%	1.1%
At award level – withdraw	1.1%	2.5%
Pass the award	95.8%	95.3%
Progressing between levels – withdraw and don't progress	4.2%	3.1%
Pass and progress to the next level	90.8%	88.5%

Our student at-risk process includes a framework which our staff utilise to effectively identify, assess and coordinate responses to students at risk of withdrawal and failure. This procedure provides clear lines of responsibility and accountable, intervention activity and supports the maximising of our students' potential to achieve their qualification [43].

Projects which enhance our student experience are created through partnership working between the student body and support staff, for example our project 'Mental Health & Wellbeing Digital: Striving to improve the mental health of commuter students from low socioeconomic backgrounds through digital innovation' [44]. This project is part of the Office for Students' mental health funding competition. This project is engaging commuter students from lower socio-economic backgrounds in prevention, support and intervention activities and strategies, to increase their mental health literacy and improve overall wellbeing. This project commenced in 2021 and has so far engaged with: over 700 students, 15 student counsellors, 23 counselling clients, 45 service referrals, 21 student fellows.

I have been given an unbelievable amount of support during my time here. Both with my mental health and some unforeseen circumstances. The staff have been incredible at ensuring I graduate my course and achieve my full potential (Student comment, NSS 2020).

Over the last four years we have embedded a range of approaches to ensure our students stay, succeed and prosper in their local regions. In fostering a sense of belonging and community within our student body, approaches such as our 360 Project, which supports the NCG EDIB strategy [58] have helped us understand the student experience of our underrepresented groups. This, in turn, has informed the outstanding quality of our curriculum and support offer. Our Peer Mentoring project [45] has brought students together from different programmes and levels to support one another in their academic achievements, all supporting our outstanding continuation rates, clearly evident in our TEF dataset.

Following the 360 Project a number of subgroups were launched including a 'Mothers as Students' group. This group was able to make recommendations to the HE Quality and Standards Committee on 19 November 2020 on tailoring approaches for students who have young children or caring responsibilities and how they can be better supported during their studies. As a result, we created a Facebook group and Microsoft Teams channel which has 47 student parents as members. These support channels are designed to be a collaborative space where our student parents share experiences, tips on juggling childcare and study, receive academic support and discuss study and life challenges with their peers.



Student Engagement (SE7)

Students across NCG develop their skills and abilities outside of their main programme. Our students are engaged through: fellowships to undertake various projects; committee memberships to inform and guide NCG HE practice and processes; student representatives; editor and peer assessor for student journal publications; and presenting at external events and conferences. Our Student Partnership and Engagement Strategy encapsulates our approach to student engagement.

The NCG student fellowship programme embeds engagement with our students, it celebrates the concept of Students as Partners by empowering students to get involved in, and be active members of, our higher education community. Across the last four years we have had in excess of 110 student fellowship roles per year [6]. The programme supports students in undertaking research or projects in their discipline, enabling them to have a positive impact on the student experience and contribute to the wider student community.

Student representation and feedback is embedded throughout all aspects of our HE learning experience. We engage and consult with students on issues and matters which may impact the student experience. Examples of include:

- The creation of Emergency Regulations which were implemented as a result of lockdown in both April 2020 and September 2021.
- How we conduct our annual graduation events.
- Capital learning resource investment priorities
- Arrangements for returning to campus post Covid-19.
- Our enrolment process for new and returning students (termed the Transition Fellow Project).
- The development and evaluation of our Access and Participation Plan.

In the 2022 NSS, our result for Student Voice was 82%, which is 10% above benchmark and a 4% increase on our 2021 result. This scale indicates outstanding quality overall and in three of the four academic years. A clear indication students feel their feedback and opinions are heard, valued and acted upon.

Student voice	Indicator	Benchmark Value	Distance to benchmark
Year 1 (earliest)	79.6%	77.0%	2.6%
Year 2	77.2%	77.6%	-0.4%
Year 3	78.4%	72.4%	6.0%
Year 4 (most recent)	82.5%	72.8%	9.7%
Overall	79.5%	74.8%	4.7%



The teachers and lecturers are great at their job and listen to students feedback, which helps the current year and upcoming years (Student comment, NSS 2019).

We have programme representatives for all of our programmes. Programme representatives bring student feedback to curriculum areas, College, and Townhall events where they work in partnership

and discuss items with senior management. Actions and responses developed from student voice feed into our Together We Changed initiative which highlights changes that have been made in response to student feedback [46].

We produce two student led in-house publications (see Folio magazine [47], and Seven Bridges journal [48]) which showcase the academic and creative work/expression of students. Folio magazine celebrates the work of students from creative industry programmes, showcasing originality, excellence and artistic practices developed by our students. Folio is a by students, for students, creation and each year is led entirely by students, carrying on the spirit of the first edition. Seven Bridges journal is a multidisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to providing an academic platform for students to disseminate research in their field. Students are recruited to take up roles as peer reviewers or as members of the editorial team.

In 2019 and 2020 we hosted TEDx events in our Peter Sarah Theatre on the Newcastle College University Centre campus [49], with 30 students organising and managing the event. The 2019 event speakers included academics, comedians, personal life story tellers, and performers. Each presented a 15-minute talk on the broad theme of “Life Finds a Way”. This theme was chosen by our students and aimed to reflect their desire to discuss mental health, wellbeing and resilience in a holistic way. The event was a sell-out (180 tickets sold) raising over £1500 for charity. Over 50% of attendees were from our student population. For our second TEDx event students elected to continue the theme from the previous year but with the 11 guest speakers specifically focussing on local and global futures. The event was a sell-out (177 tickets sold) and £1635 was raised for charity [50]. These events engaged students in wider discourse outside of their course and developed networking opportunities.

NCG students have been invited to present at the prestigious Posters in Parliament (BCUR) event [51]. NCG has been represented every year of the event. This high-profile event brings together a remarkable collection of the best undergraduate research from across the country. Our students excel at this event and have a vital experiences worth listening to, providing evidence of our excellent teaching, learning, and student experience. Two NCG examples from the most recent event in March 2020 (no event took place in 2021 or 2022) are from students Chris Haswell (Sport) and Melissa Moodie (Engineering). They presented their research on “The effects of radial shockwave therapy on chronic calf muscle strain injuries in runners” and “Trent XWB 84K EP Fan Disc - New Product Introduction into Shotpeen”. Chris was shortlisted for an award as part of the judging process.

We challenge and broaden the view and experience of our student body. We take an outwardly facing approach to learning, seeking the views of others to challenge and grow the world/subject view of students. Our students present at the British Conference of Undergraduate Research (BCUR). For example, we had 4 students present at the 2019 event [52]:

- Radiyah Uddin - An exploration students understanding of assessment criteria and how it affects the learning process, overall performance, and attainment.
- Natalie Ellis - Is the system failing children with mental health? A Frontline perspective.
- James O'Hara - An investigating into the reasons why, in relation to PISA attainment scales, Estonia has a greater level of attainment in education compared to other former soviet states.
- Hannah Hall - An investigation into artists, whether they are more susceptible to mental illness and are drawn to the subject as a form of self-therapy.

In 2021 we launched ExPO22 a student engagement initiative to build on our established student conference and TEDx events. ExPO22 drew together students from across our HE programmes to showcase projects, share expertise, and enhance the student experience. The event was centred around the themes: 'The Here and Now', 'What's Next', and 'Bigger than Us' [53]. In total over 30 events were organised across the week by students and staff across NCG. 630 students attended the events, which included workshops, guest speakers, performances, and masterclasses [54].

“ To me, the student ExPO event opened a window to my course and what we do at the Newcastle Aviation Academy. The Wednesday showcase provided an important stage for curriculums and Fellowships, to promote themselves to the NCUC learning community. The Women's Empowerment event was a great reminder of the many challenges that women have and continue to face in the world of academia and work. It developed a conversation, which particularly got me thinking about the experiences that women are continually faced with, in areas like mine, such as STEM (Student comment, ExPO Student Evaluation Survey 2022).

“ ExPO2022 was a great experience to see how other courses operating and an insight to the range of educational genres the college has to offer. I was lucky enough to demonstrate skill from my area to other students and hopefully let them learn as much as I did from the event (Student comment, ExPO Student Evaluation Survey 2022).



Student Progression (SO3)

NCG provides technical and vocational courses, the purpose of which is to ensure our students gain meaningful employment in the local or regional economy, supporting the reduction in national skills gaps which is a policy priority for the UK Government. For those students already in work, our part time provision aims to improve their career prospects which is evidenced in our outstanding part time progression metric currently at 5% above benchmark.

The majority of our provision is delivered as a 2+1 model (Foundation Degree with a Top-Up). Two-year NCG Foundation Degrees are designed so that students can either progress into meaningful employment or continue into higher level study. NCG Foundation Degrees are unique in equipping students with a combination of vocational and technical skills with academic skills and knowledge. The vast majority of our Honours top-up cohort are students who have completed a Foundation Degree with us (86% in 2021). These graduates are made up of professions including teachers, aircraft engineers and sports rehabilitators. Over the last four years we have had 495 students graduate with PSRB accreditation. Currently eight of our programmes also provide an option to study for one year (Certificate in HE) and this still leads to meaningful work (see Health below) or for our performance courses, progression opportunities with other specialist providers (i.e., conservatoires, Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts).

“ I feel I have gained loads of knowledge and learned new skills over the past 4 years, which has given me the confidence to fill a job role I have always aspired to (Student comment, NSS 2021).

“ The course has been insightful and the perfect introduction to the industry. Providing all the skills needed to be prepared for a job. The work and teachers make the course (Student comment, NSS 2022).

The below examples of graduate progression highlight our flexible curriculum offer which enables our students to gain meaningful employment within this sector having studied via a one, two or three-year route:

Counselling programmes: Graduates from our counselling programmes are key in supporting the national commitment to mental health and wellbeing critical to a productive and healthy society. Graduates secure roles working within the NHS as qualified counsellors or progress to managing their own private counselling practice.

Integrated Health, Social Care & Well-being programmes: Our graduates progress into a range of higher-level roles within social care and education. Alumni have progressed into employment roles such as: residential care manager, drug and alcohol rehabilitation manager, family support-work manager, and newly formed NHS social prescriber roles. We have high success rates for graduates securing places onto master's level programmes in social work in particular, which is supporting with the national shortage of qualified social workers. Staff shortages in social work have resulted in skills shortages locally, particularly in children's social care [[Ofsted Children's Social Care 2022: Recovering from the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)].

Healthcare & Public Health programmes: Our FdSc Healthcare Practice graduates progress into roles within the NHS as healthcare assistant and senior healthcare assistants. Some students use the one year HE Certificate in Healthcare Practice to gain experience within hospital and clinical settings to then progress onto a Nursing undergraduate programme. Alumni of our Public Health degree have progressed into Health Improvement Practitioners and managers roles within Newcastle, Gateshead and Northumberland Public Health teams.

Music, Performance and Acting: Graduates from our BA (Hons) Acting and Performance Practice programme progress into skilled employment on the commercial and public stage within local theatre (e.g. Alphabetti, Northern Stage, Live Theatre) and television (e.g. The Stomping Ground, Vera and Tracey Beaker). Graduates have progressed to work professionally in national and international projects and performances.

Renewable Energy programmes: Have been developed in response to increased demand from local and national industry for specialist engineering technicians and managers. Our graduates help fulfill the skills gaps and are supporting the ever-growing need for low carbon energy production. The roles our graduates have progressed into, with employers such as Port of Blyth and Catapult, are technician and engineer positions in the following renewable energy sectors: bio-energy, wind power, solar energy, wave energy, tidal energy and in the off-shore energy industry.

Uniformed Public Service programmes: Our BSc (Hons) Professional Policing programme is licensed by the College of Policing and was developed to support the governments '[Beating Crime Plan](#)'; to put 20'000 additional officers on the streets by 2023. Graduates from this programme go onto careers in: policing, probation services, youth offending.

Sport and Exercise programmes: Our BSc (Hons) Sport and Exercise Rehabilitation programme is accredited with the British Association of Sports Rehabilitators and Trainers (BASRaT). BASRaT are a UK regulator and professional association, and their register of Sport Rehabilitators is accredited by the Professional Standards Authority. Typical progression routes for graduates from this programme are into self-employment (examples of recent graduates: <https://rossgladwin.co.uk/>, <https://sicktherapy.co.uk/>), working with sports teams, and working alongside physiotherapists. Graduates from this programme are successful in applying for Health Service vacancies, e.g. <https://www.jobs.nhs.uk/xi/vacancy/917359067>.

We are keen to draw the panels attention to the context within which NCG Graduate Outcomes should be considered. The present methodology used to record Graduate Outcomes does not capture the success of NCG graduates the majority of whom progress into their chosen career e.g. teaching, childcare, digital arts, design and performing arts and health and social care. The current approach of the Graduate Outcomes survey disproportionately disadvantages NCG's progression metric even though these programmes lead our graduates to meaningful careers and work, many providing vital care and other services required for a healthy, vibrant community. Furthermore, the assessment is based on 'all undergraduate' at an aggregate level which disadvantages institutions like ours that primarily offer Level 4 and 5 technical education courses rather than first degrees. Our employment outcomes for students completing Level 4 and Level 5 qualifications are outstanding, and an enabler into positive employment and should not be compared to those completing a Level 6 qualification. Upon completion our students are prepared for and gain highly skilled work which firmly places them on a life changing career trajectory with local, regional and national employers.



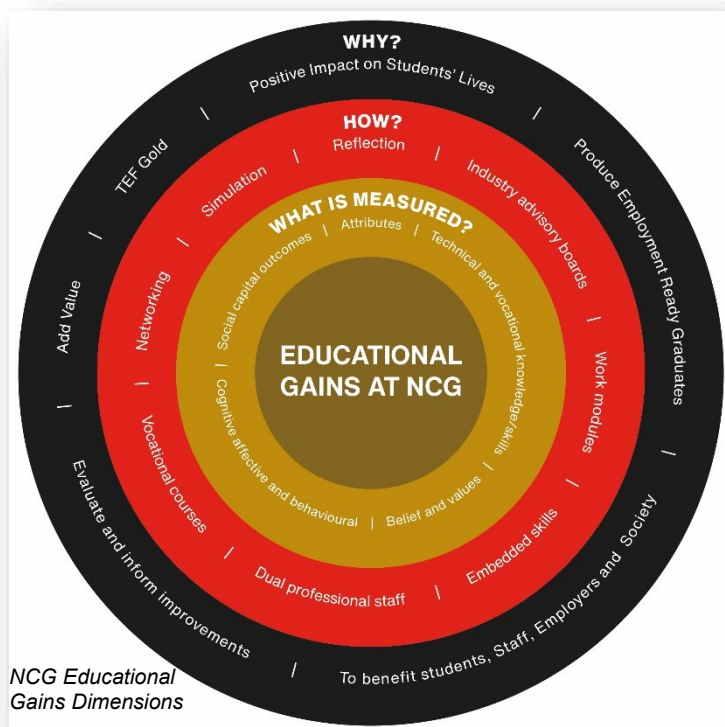
Educational Gains (SO4, SO5, SO6)

The qualities, behaviours, skills and knowledge our students develop during their time at NCG HE are focussed on preparation for employment with wider individual and community benefits in terms of life and social skills and maximising opportunity. These qualities, behaviours, skills and knowledge are derived from our HE mission and strategy and the following external reference points:

- Occupational standards.
- Professional Statutory Regulatory Bodies (PSRB's).
- Organisational strategies (NCG & HE).
- Advisory boards.
- External benchmark statements.
- Research.

At NCG we identify Educational Gains to encompass development in: confidence and resilience, critical thinking, creativity, communication, reflection and vocational & technical skills development. We believe that these are the essential qualities required for shaping the pre-professional identities of our students through the technical and vocational opportunities provided within our degrees. Students are fully supported to develop these qualities through wide-ranging additional enhancement opportunities such as: work placements, trips, guest speakers from industry, mentoring and volunteering opportunities, as well as specialist workshops to support in the developed of vocational or technical skills. Engaging with inspirational industry advisors/experts is at the heart of our curriculum because student encounters with experts in their field of interest is highly motivational.

Our model is adapted from Evans et al. (2018) 'Considering Learning Gain' [55]. After consideration of 'what' to measure we decided on a more generalised gain and acquisition of qualities, behaviours, skills and knowledge and the application of these including preparation for employment. We then considered 'how' to measure and decide to measure between points in time and the role of individual differences and contextual variables.



As demonstrated within this submission, typically our students are underrepresented in HE or have experienced disadvantage or a lack of educational opportunities in comparison to their peers at more selective institutions. However, despite the ‘burdens of historical social influencers on our students’ (Wragg et al 2020) [56], we believe that our highly vocational HE awards, the additional qualities and attributes gained and the passion and dedication of the industry-experience and networked staff, ‘opens doors’ and opportunities to our students that would otherwise not be accessible, therefore encouraging aspiration and enabling social mobility.



I have landed my desired line of work, thanks to the college (Student comment, NSS 2020).

An employability project [57] was launched in 2020-21 to enhance the skills, behaviours and attributes of our students. At phase 1 we consulted with employers regarding the key attributes for employment when recruiting graduates. These were identified as: application of number; application of IT; communication; resilience; teamwork; problem solving; creativity and innovation; self-awareness and self-management; planning and time management; social, cultural and global awareness; and commercial awareness. We adopted these 11 skills across all levels and contextualised them to each programme. This project encouraged students to identify, reflect on and employ (i.e. at interviews) a specific set of skills, which are embedded within the curriculum and pedagogy which would directly enhance their employability. Now in phase 2 the project is exploring methods to capture student performance against the dimensions (confidence, communication etc).

Our technical and vocational programmes, develop the skills and qualities employers value as well as reflective and academic skills and competencies. We believe the individual qualities of our students is forged through opportunities for belief and value formation provided by NCG’s foundation degrees mapped to the [QAA Characteristics Statement: Foundation Degree](#). Here, as well as the inclusion of highly technical and vocational subject-specific modules, one third of the total credits are dedicated to personal and professional development and work-related and work-based learning. Aligned to our approach to Educational Gains, this enables students to firstly develop their personal qualities, and then (in Level 5), focus on the development of their pre-professional identity through self-reflection in the context of the values, behaviours and standards required in their chosen industry. Our students also develop the qualities, behaviours, skills and knowledge set out in our approach to Educational Gains through the curriculum and wider learning opportunities. In addition, they are also supported to develop these by our Careers Team through the provision of workshops, specialist materials, podcasts, webinars and one to one support. The work of the Careers Team is underpinned by Career Development Theory, which goes beyond employability development, to a focus on continuous lifelong developmental experiences.

In order to effectively evaluate Educational Gain, we are combining two different approaches: firstly, a cross-sectional approach (comparing students in different cohorts at the same time) and secondly through longitudinal (distance travelled over time) analysis. Recognising the importance of effective evaluation of Educational Gains we have carefully considered how best to capture these changes over time. We are therefore applying TASO's (Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in higher education) Process and Implementation Evaluative approach and a range of current and planned methods including:

- Analysis of module assessment outcomes by assessment mode e.g., marks for presentations (a common tool for assessment) for all students over time. This data will enable us to track the educational gain in confidence and communications skills for each student as they progress through their studies with us. This data will further enable us to identify areas of good practice for implementation across our curriculum.
- Self-reporting of education gains through a Self-Perception Career Readiness Survey which captures positive changes in qualities, behaviours, skills, knowledge and work-readiness, and personal development through self-reflection. The results of the survey inform pedagogies, the curriculum and the support services provided.
- 'Staff Employability Survey' (readiness to develop employability in students) - this survey was developed to assess staff perceptions of the student's career readiness and educational gains at the start and end of the student lifecycle (i.e., confidence and resilience, critical thinking, creativity, communication, reflection and vocational & technical skills development.) along with their ability to support students in preparing and gaining meaningful employment.
- Educational Gains e-Portfolio - We are currently developing an e-portfolio system, which aligns to our generic modules (work related learning, work based learning, academic study skills and personal and professional development) at Levels 4 and 5. This will enable the capture of tutorial feedback and student reflections, along with students' reflective blogs and survey data in one place.



The quality of the work I have been able to create has increased dramatically over the past 4 years at the college (Student comment, NSS 2019).

Closing statement

NCG students receive a highly technical and vocational experience, relational teaching, and bespoke support within industry-standard physical and virtual learning spaces. Our highly trained dual-professional teachers and support staff motivate and inspire in their facilitation of an outstanding experience for students who historically have not accessed or succeeded in traditional higher education. The vocational preparation of our students entering higher education with us goes beyond a passive 'belief' and 'hope' for a career. It is a carefully thought out set of teaching and learning practices and student reflections which take account of the complexities of the social influences impacting on these students and ultimately creates outstanding opportunities and outcomes. Our student experience and outcomes are among the very highest quality found in the sector for the mix of students and courses we teach. Together we are outstanding, together we are 'One NCG'.

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