TEF Provider Submission
Abingdon & Witney College, January 2018

Background and overview

Abingdon and Witney College is a medium sized, general further education college operating mainly from three sites across south and west Oxfordshire, offering courses from pre-entry to level seven. In 2016-17, it had approximately 15,000 further education students of whom 1,700 were full time 16-18 year olds, 2500 were funded adults and 9000 were community learning learners. The college specialises in vocational, technical and professional education at levels 1-5, takes close account of local skills needs when determining its curriculum offer and has a strong culture of inclusion and widening participation. 64% of students accessing college HE have low to non-tariff on entry (27% low tariff and 37% non-tariff) and 35% are typically from disadvantaged backgrounds (POLAR quintiles 3 or below).

The college is a longstanding associate college partner (ACP) of Oxford Brookes University, validates a small number of HE courses with University of Gloucestershire and has a small, but growing, direct contract with HEFCE. We were reviewed by the QAA in March 2014 and found to meet expectations in all areas, and commended in relation to the enhancement of student learning opportunities. Approximately 300 full time and 50 part time HE students study each year.

Analysis of the overall core metrics clearly confirms a strong provision where student outcomes consistently outperform similar providers. The full-time core metrics display 2 positive flags, which reflect and confirm the Colleges' culture of commitment to developing excellence in teaching and learning, and enabling student development and achievement, leading to outstanding student outcomes and high levels of employability. The core metrics indicate an initial hypothesis of Silver, however, this submission will make a compelling case that Gold is a more accurate representation of the high-quality provision at the College based on additional quantitative and qualitative data covering the entirety of our HE teaching provision (NSS related metrics apply to only 26% of College HE students).

Teaching Quality

Student Engagement (TQ1)

High quality teaching throughout the provision ensures that all students are challenged to fulfil their potential and achieve outstanding outcomes. Student achievement rates are excellent at 88%, an increase of 13pp from previous year and 19pp above our validating university's benchmark. Students achieve grade profiles significantly above national and validating university benchmarks:

- 34% of level 6 students achieved a first-class honours degree at the College (10pp above national figures and 14pp above our validating university)
- 33% of foundation degree and HNC students achieved at Distinction level (12pp above our validating university)
- DLHE survey data indicates outstanding graduate employment and progression to further study. Graduate progression within the core metrics is given as 94.6% (6pp above validating university benchmark for Foundation Degree students and 14pp above benchmark for degree students).

The College has always been fully committed to ensuring that teaching is of the highest quality to enable students to achieve to the best of their abilities. The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy, the Staff Development Policy and the teaching observation process, underpin and drive the strategic approach to teaching and learning. Our investment in the Teaching Skills Academy

(TSA), our award-winning, innovative teaching hub for teachers, has had a direct and sustained impact on the quality of teaching, leading to improved teaching observation judgements, higher student satisfaction and excellent outcomes for all students. The significant emphasis the college places on the quality of teaching was acknowledged in the HER (2014):

> *The review team identified as good practice the systematic approach adopted by the College, which drives the support and development of effective teaching, learning and assessment across all programmes; The review team observed a high degree of commitment to the enhancement of learning and teaching through peer review and effective staff development, which is systematically monitored.*

There is a strong focus on student feedback and we place great emphasis and value on the collection and use of the student voice to drive forward the enhancement of the student experience. Thorough consideration is given to all student feedback and we have invested significant resources in collecting, reviewing and acting on student feedback. Our latest internal student satisfaction survey (December 2017) indicates that 98% of HE students are satisfied with the quality of their course. We ask students to specifically comment on the quality of their teaching and the feedback we receive is excellent:

"Teaching quality is very good. The teachers are really supportive when they need to be but also challenge you at the same time which is really good too" [current top-up student]. *"My tutors are always so helpful and positive about the course. Their enthusiasm shows in lectures which makes me feel positive about the course and my future. Lecturers are very passionate about what they want to get from us and clearly understand what they are talking about"* [current first year foundation degree student].

The College has in place an established system of student representation, which involves elected student representatives participating as full members of various deliberative forums including programme committees, annual review meetings and field meetings. Students are engaged in feedback mechanisms from the outset though the use of the HE Induction Survey, which captures feedback early in the students' academic life. Feedback from this survey has been used to modify the induction process annually to best suit the needs of students and employers. Further surveys include end of module evaluations, the HE satisfaction survey and the NSS. This embedded and holistic approach is highly successful in encouraging and supporting students to commit to and actively engage in their learning which is evidence by an upward trend in the increase of attendance (84% (2014-15) 88% (2015-16) to 90% (2016-17)) and retention to the end of the course (80% (2014-15) 82% (2015-16) to 88% (2016-17)) across all HE programmes.

Student feedback is used to generate robust action plans for quality improvement in each programme and each action plan is reviewed through discussion with the student body. Main themes from across the provision are discussed at senior-level committees such as the HE Steering Group, the College Leadership Team and the Curriculum and Quality Committee of the Board of Governors. Feedback has been used to increase resourcing, such as the provision of new laptops and additional hard copy texts in the library that exceed the stocking density of that provided by the awarding HEI, to carrying out an early induction trip to the awarding HEI to ease the transition into HE.

All HE programmes have a generous amount of contact time allocated. HE cohort sizes are small, averaging 15 students in each class. The college is committed to teaching small group sizes and the two programmes that exceed 27 students are split into two cohorts for teaching. This institutional commitment ensures that all module leaders have an intimate understanding of the academic ability, progress and challenges that are unique to each student in their class, resulting in highly personalised support in every lesson. In addition to module contact time, all students have a 1 hour timetabled tutorial slot each week. This valuable, additional contact time facilitates further student engagement with their studies, allowing students to take ownership of their academic

progression under the guidance of their tutor. These tutorials are highly valued by students and they express this in their feedback:

"Thank you for being such a great influence in my life, I've come such a long way and I'm afraid you aren't aware that this is actually greatly due to you. Your support has made me feel strong enough to tackle many obstacles that have come my way. I hope we can still keep in touch in the future and I just wanted to let you know how glad I have been to have met you. You are an incredible teacher and I think you will truly inspire many people." [student from the business programme commenting on tutor support].

The unique nature of the timetable for our HE programmes facilitates high-level engagement and commitment to study. In response to extensive consultation with students and employers, this timetable allows employers to day-release their employees, students to work part time alongside study or fulfil work placement requirements, and students with families and caring responsibilities to more easily manage their time. Very high levels of attendance and continuation data and the increasing number of students sponsored by employers evidence the effectiveness of this strategy.

The high level of student engagement in stimulating and challenging teaching, coupled with small class sizes and generous contact time, ensure that outcomes for College HE students are consistently excellent and outperform similar programmes run nationally and at our validating university.

Valuing Teaching (TQ2)

There has long been a sustained culture of excellence in teaching and learning at the college where high quality teaching is valued and celebrated throughout the organisation. A supportive teaching culture empowers teachers to take responsibility for their own professional development supported by formal and informal professional feedback on teaching strategies and impact. This core supportive approach stimulates motivation in all teachers to strive to achieve excellence in teaching. In addition, we support industry professionals and new HE lecturers in their transition to HE teaching through an innovative and bespoke Licence to Teach programme. The industry currency that they bring to the programmes ensures that students are exposed to up to date knowledge and practices.

Considerable investment has been made in the teaching skills of HE staff. Investment in the Teaching Skills Academy (TSA), our Beacon Award-winning, innovative teaching hub for teachers, has had a direct impact on the quality of teaching, leading to improved teaching judgements, increased student satisfaction and consequently, outstanding student outcomes. The TSA is run 'by teachers, for teachers' which completely supports our embedded culture of empowering teachers to take ownership of their professional development. Best practice in teaching is consistently seen in teachers' ability to develop students' professional and transferable skills, questioning techniques employed and in providing sufficient stretch and challenge for HE students. Investment has included funding dedicated HE TSA coaches, as well as a physical teaching skills innovation hub on both of our main campuses. 93% of all staff surveyed agreed that education is central to the management strategy of the College, which places us in the top 7% of all colleges nationally.

The college recognises that excellent teaching is underpinned by excellent teaching staff. A robust policy exists for the recruitment and selection of staff, which ensures that all new staff have the capability to support students in the development of their academic, personal and professional potential. All HE teaching staff hold a Level 5 or 6 teaching qualification, in addition to a relevant professional qualification(s), or extensive experience within their industry. Approximately 76% of HE teaching staff have a post-graduate degree with an additional 10% being supported to work towards; all have extensive industry experience which makes them experts in their field.

Sharing best practice in teaching is integral to improving the professional development of all teaching staff. In addition to cross-college development days, a specific HE Development Day takes place, where colleagues from all faculties deliver sessions on areas of outstanding practice identified from their own teaching. Such examples from the 2017 development day include: metacognition, developing students' academic ability, becoming research active and innovative use of digital learning in HE. The quality of the staff development sessions is commended by the awarding HEI. At the Annual Associate College Partnership conference in January 2017 the College was invited to present its research initiative in order to share this best practice and in 2018 the college led three teaching and learning focused workshops.

An effective Teaching, Learning and Assessment Strategy contributes to very high quality teaching on all courses. A rigorous process is in place for assuring the quality of all teaching, learning and assessment, underpinned by an effective Teaching, Learning and Assessment strategy. The college takes a holistic, developmental approach to evaluating and improving the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, partly through observations of teaching. Following observation, each member of teaching staff is allocated to a Development Pathway (developmental, aspirational, leadership) based upon the quality of their teaching, learning and assessment to date. This pathway informs a personalised staff Personal Development Plan (PDP) which is discussed and reviewed termly.

The college has a vibrant, developmental and supportive culture that recognises and rewards excellence in teaching. The importance the college places on the delivery of high quality teaching is manifested in the ways in which we develop, support and reward academic staff in relation to learning and teaching. The college is fully committed to the on-going development and continual improvement of all staff, through comprehensive staff development and positive performance management activities, a clear appraisal and PDP process, and by making internal progression and promotion opportunities available. 95% of HE teaching staff are in the Aspirational or Leadership category with 27% of staff moving upwards through the pathways over the past two years.

Teaching staff who regularly demonstrate areas of best practice are encouraged to apply to become a TSA coach, deliver training sessions and provide support for fellow HE teachers. Several HE staff have successfully applied for staff development funding to undertake postgraduate study within their specialist subject area, or to undertake HE teaching qualifications. Staff that have expressed a research interest are allocated hours to allow them to develop projects with students in preparation for conferences and journal publication.

As well as formal progression and staff development opportunities, a variety of less formal reward and recognition schemes are also in place. Staff and teaching areas that have been identified as outstanding are invited to attend an annual "Grade 1" celebration event, hosted by senior managers to celebrate outstanding performance. All staff are also invited to the annual Staff Celebration event and awards ceremony where outstanding staff performance is recognised.

Rigour and Stretch (TQ3)

The college has a long established and highly effective practice of rigor associated with the development and review of programmes and challenge to students ensuring that they meet their full potential. The high level of rigour and stretch throughout our HE programmes is reflected in the high foundation degree/ HNC and degree classifications achieved by our students (12pp and 14pp higher than our validating HEI respectively).

All new programmes undergo a robust internal approval process via the HE Steering Group where proposed programmes are scrutinised to ensure that the course can be resourced effectively, that

likely student demand has been tested and that employers have been integrally involved in course design. Potential progression opportunities for graduates are also outlined at this stage. The validation/ revalidation process then follows HEI procedures and, coupled with on-going engagement with External Examiners, this process effectively ensures that appropriate academic standards are adhered to. The college receives regular positive feedback from the external examiners, such as: *"I am pleased to continue to report that the standards of student performance are comparable to those at other HEIs in the UK. The highest levels of student achievement are excellent and compare very well with those in other Foundation and Bachelor programmes".*

Feedback is taken from students during the formal lesson observation process. Comments include: *"I am enjoying some challenging content and stretching linked to other modules" "…very clear teaching style that challenges us but in a safe and helpful way" "….very thorough, if I don't understand [the lecturer] will take time to explain further".*

Students and staff are both engaged to systematically review and enhance course delivery, ensuring that the development of independent study and research skills are effective. As an example, following student feedback, we re-timetabled a finance module within the Business Degree programme from the afternoon to the morning to aid concentration levels. The impact was seen by a 12pp increase in average marks.

95% of all NSS eligible students agree, within the internal HE survey, that their course is intellectually stimulating reflecting the rigour and stretch within teaching and beyond. Students are very well prepared by their programme to achieve their educational and professional goals, and consequently achieve outstanding rates of progression into employment or further study and progression into highly skilled employment is particularly significant. Core metrics illustrate that rates of progression into highly skilled employment or further study, are considerably higher than benchmark (6.1pp higher), further supporting our assessment that our HE programmes stretch students to meet their full potential.

Feedback (TQ4)

Assessment and feedback are used effectively to support students' development, progression and attainment, leading to outstanding outcomes for all students. All members of HE teaching staff use ProMonitor (an eILP system) to monitor student attainment and progress, and to set targets and provide feedback for students. As well as class-based discussions and written assignment feedback, the regular personal tutorials that take place on each course provide opportunities for detailed 1:1 discussion and constructive feedback. Assessment outcomes and feedback are discussed and used to determine targets for each student, further engaging students in the feedback that they have received and ensuring that students are able to learn effectively from the assessment process. Through the support of the TSA Coaches and the specific HE staff development sessions focusing on feedback, areas of best practice are disseminated across the entire provision.

Termly HE KPI performance monitoring meetings continue to be a robust means of monitoring students. Using ProMonitor as a tracking tool, each KPI meeting focuses on the setting and reviewing of student targets, monitoring academic progress and recording of tutorials and study support. These meetings also provide an opportunity to review the extent to which teachers are following college processes and procedures relating to the timely and effective provision of feedback to students. Since their launch in 2014, KPI meetings have resulted in a significant and sustained upward trajectory in a range of key indicators such as student attainment, awarded classification, attendance and graduate progression.

NSS feedback in the full-time TEF metrics for all years regarding 'teaching on my course', 'assessment and feedback' and 'academic support' show indicators below the overall benchmark

figure. These overall figures were skewed by an unexpected and isolated response by students in year 3. 86% of NSS eligible students agreed that assessment and feedback on their course was strong in the latest internal student survey (December 2017) which is 9pp above benchmark.

Scrutiny of the indicators highlight an upward trajectory from year 1 to year 2 across all NSS metrics: 'teaching on my course' +11.9pp, 'assessment and feedback' +12.2pp and 'academic support' +21.4pp, evidencing the impact of an overarching strategic view of improving and enhancing academic quality and student outcomes, translated into systemic results across all HE curriculum. These cross college strategies include; curriculum level KPI meetings, where student attendance, academic performance, recorded tutorial sessions and target setting is reviewed; HE specific lesson observations and targeted professional development; the tutorial support system and use of ProMonitor to academically track student progression. These quality assurance processes have been thoroughly embedded across all HE programmes for several years and have resulted in the excellent student outcomes seen in the metrics.

Scrutiny of the indicators moving from year 2 to year 3 highlight a downward trajectory across NSS metrics. This is due to three factors; one localised programme issue which has since been resolved fully, the eligibility of students for the NSS and the aggressive contact students received from Ipsos Mori where students expressed very strong dissatisfaction concerning the aggressively targeted approach by Ipsos Mori during the NSS 2017 survey, which was reflected in the results. In particular, students studying BSc Equine Science and BSc Equine Science and Thoroughbred Management were very vocal in their dissatisfaction. The college has fed back to HEFCE on several occasions.

The decline in NSS results for year 3 specifically related to question 10 "feedback on my work has been timely". The college was aware of an isolated localised issue, relating to one cohort of Foundation Degree Animal Behaviour and Welfare students, where, due to unexpected staff illness, feedback was not returned within the agreed timescale. To safeguard the students' academic development, future assessment deadlines were extended, numerous support sessions offered and additional resources deployed to the curriculum area to rectify the situation as soon as possible. The College's swift action ensured that student outcomes were not adversely affected. Closer scrutiny of feedback timescales now feature in all KPI meetings. To provide further assurance that the matter was resolved and no longer having a negative impact on the student experience, module evaluations for the BSc (hons) top-up Animal Behaviour and Welfare (the same students who had identified the original issue) and the Foundation Degree Animal Behaviour and Welfare students in November 2017 were closely analysed. 100% of students responded that they 'definitely agree' or 'agree' with the question relating to "feedback on my work has been prompt". Those students fed back with specific comments: "*Always had a lot of comments on how to improve work….prompt replies to emails for help with assignments*". Therefore, the issue that led to the downward trajectory has been resolved. Student feedback as part of the TEF submission confirmed that "*more prompt and personalised feedback has helped us to look more in depth in research methods and critical thinking, not only in academic work but in personal life too*".

The issues that affect one cohort can have profound effects on the TEF metrics, since only 57 students were eligible for the NSS in 2017. This represents 26% of the total HE population. In addition to first year students, students completing top-up programmes and those on PT HNC's are not eligible, leaving a significant proportion of students without the ability to offer feedback via the NSS. To ensure that all graduating student satisfaction is captured the college launches the HE Internal Survey. Not only does this provide valuable data and information prior to receiving the results of the National Student Survey (NSS), it allows us to collect the thoughts and opinions of our entire HE cohort while they are on programme. The HE Internal Survey, which asks the same students the same NSS questions, demonstrates a sustainment or improvement in satisfaction in all TEF metrics and an overall satisfaction score of 88%, rising 11pp from 2016. The upward trajectory seen between the 2015 and 2016 NSS metrics are also seen in the HE Internal Survey results further reinforcing the internal survey as an accurate measure of student satisfaction and that the 2017 NSS results are not an accurate representation of student satisfaction.

HE Internal Survey Results	Year 1 (2015)	Year 2 (2016)	Year 3 (2017)	TEF Benchmark	Difference
The teaching on my course	76	88	88	85.2	+2.8
Assessment and feedback	82	80	80	75.8	+4.2
Academic support	86	80	86	82.2	+3.8

Learning Environment

Resources (LE1)

The College is committed fully to investing in the student learning environment, both physical and virtual, investing over £35 million since 2012, leading to outstanding student outcomes. HE students have benefitted from the extensive expansion and upgrading of student physical and digital resources across the College both at Witney and Abingdon campuses. This includes a new library, a new advanced engineering block, a dissection laboratory, refurbished classrooms, and general refurbishment and upgrades to all study spaces and social areas. Practical teaching facilities are very well received by students and employers. Feedback collected through student rep meetings include comments such as “the laboratory helps us to practice and see what is taught, it links to the theory”. Oxford Brookes University students also have access to university campus facilities in nearby Oxford.

As a condition of both internal pre-validation scrutiny and validation conditions, each programme is fully resourced prior to the first intake of students. The college continues to capture feedback on resourcing throughout the academic year, making any adjustments where needed. HE students have access to a dedicated study support team which provides valuable advice on academic writing, dissertation research and development of independent research skills. The impact of this is seen in the excellent grade profile across the provision.

Feedback from students indicated that they would appreciate a dedicated HE space with additional digital resources and the ability to establish more of a HE community and HE ethos within the College environment. In response, the college has just opened a brand new £4m Advanced Skills Centre. This state-of-the-art facility promises to bring new and exciting opportunities to current and future HE students and has been designed in conjunction with key employer stakeholders, e.g. BMW. The centre includes a technology laboratory, high-level engineering design cell, digital and group workspaces, a large HE breakout and relaxed-learning spaces with computers, areas for individual group study. The spacious breakout areas and lounges give HE students that university-feel whilst on campus.

Significant investment has also been made in digital resources. All classrooms are fitted with state of the art smart screens and numerous PC suites and open access digital learning spaces are available for HE students to use. Reliable and fast Wi-Fi with effective remote access to resources, also enables students to use their own devices if they so wish. Wherever possible, teaching and learning strategies fully utilise the opportunities afforded by effective engagement with our VLE. Yammer is used as a highly effective medium to create a virtual HE course community both on and off campus.

Scholarship, Research and Professional Practice (LE2)

The learning environment is very well enriched by student exposure to scholarship, research and professional practice on the vast majority of programmes. As part of their contract of employment, teaching staff are required to maintain their vocational and academic

currency, ensuring that they are up to date with the latest research and academic thinking in their field. All staff spend at least two days per year in industry to maintain their practice, and all have well defined continual professional development activities and objectives outlined within an annual personal development plan, regularly reviewed with their line manager. The continual focus on the maintenance and further development of subject expertise amongst HE teachers has been effective; teaching observations identified lecturer subject expertise as good or better for 90% teachers in 2015/16, but by 2016/17 this indicator had improved even further, with all lecturers having subject expertise identified as a strength or area of best practice.

On all courses, the results of current scholarship, research and professional activities are effectively integrated into teaching and learning activities. HE students are exposed to different forms of scholarship, including student scholarly activity, research opportunities, and professional practice/employer engagement activities relevant to their programme of study. The curriculum is enhanced by organised visits that raise student awareness and understanding of the sector. This additional understanding enhances the student experience and allows them to more effectively contextualise and apply their learning. For example, FD Early Years students visit a triple-rated outstanding nursery setting in Worthing, which represents a model of leading practice in the UK and abroad, and whose practitioners are engaged in regular research. As another opportunity to enhance professional practice, second year students participated in a sponsored trip to Gambia, where they spent 3 days volunteering in local schools and preschools. In FD and BSc Animal Behaviour and Welfare, students join a trip with Gap Africa, where they participate in and develop their practical skills in data collection in herbivore feeding habits, predator distributions, flora management and rehabilitation techniques, allowing them to apply their research and scholarly activity to global issues.

Staff effectively use their extensive industry and subject expertise to enhance students' learning. Staff ensure that their lectures are updated frequently and encourage learners to find research relevant to the topic areas for discussion within lectures. Dissertation supervisors have been praised by the HEI through the rigorous Periodic Review process, with commendations seen across several programmes for “the links with industry, specifically with regard to their engagement with students undertaking dissertation projects.” Students confirm that teachers effectively communicate their subject expertise; 93% of students surveyed in 2015/16 said that their course was intellectually stimulating, and 85% said that staff made the subject interesting. In 2016-17, that percentage rose to 99% and 100% respectively. Further comments from external examiners evidence the research ethos and the impact on students:

“The inclusion and encouragement to utilise current research findings in the study area, both throughout the curriculum and for assessment purposes, prepares graduates to enter what is now a globalised and rapidly changing industry. Students apply research findings to the working equine industry and emphasise the relevance of such findings to equine wellbeing. I feel this demonstrates that students understand the importance of research to the wider equine community and also the importance of good quality research. The higher graded pieces of work also demonstrate critical analysis and discussion of current issues and developments including gaps in knowledge. Many of the dissertations that I was able to view covered subject areas related to very practical aspects of equine training and sports performance, which is an area requiring further research and is relevant to the programmes being studied.” [External Examiner, BSc Equine Science programmes].

Since 2014, in direct response to both staff and student feedback, the college has focussed particularly on further developing an ethos of research and scholarly activity amongst staff and students. In 2014, the college funded a member of HE staff to explore research opportunities with students, in collaboration with key industry experts. As a direct result of this initiative, several poster abstracts and presentations were delivered and published and dissertation students were published with support from lecturers, with these students presenting their original research at national and international conferences.

This has now grown to a cross-institutional approach. We celebrated a series of student-staff collaborations including, several published abstracts to peer-reviewed journals and poster presentations delivered by students at a range of both national conferences and international conferences. In addition, our lecturers are now publishing their own research to peer-reviewed journals with several papers and conference presentations through the academic year, including one piece of research that was used in a commissioned report to the government using the lecturer's recommendations as two out of three proposed.

These successes have inspired students to consider presentation and publication as an integral part of their course, and given students the confidence and skills to use original research in dissertations and independent studies. We can see the impact through the HE internal survey and the increase in students finding the content intellectually stimulating, and the increase in higher grades highlights that the students are thinking more critically about their assessments and so are able to access the grades associated with higher order thinking skills.

This is further documented in the Annual Review process. Course Annual Reviews highlight approaches to teaching, learning and assessment that the course team considers to be having a particularly positive impact on the learning experience and/or student achievement, and which they wish to share with their colleagues (within the College and/or across the ACP) to benefit students across the courses they offer. In 2016, the college research initiative was identified as best practice: "The team has greatly expanded the research profile. A range of high quality student work has been presented and published at industry wide conferences and in journals. These have all been related to dissertation work produced by final year students. This has added to the HE profile and gives HE students an aspirational goal in their studies. Future investigations will centre on how to share these student experiences across the cohorts, and celebrate the successes of both staff and students." At the Annual ACP conference in January 2017 the College was invited to present its research initiative to the HEI and partner colleges in order to share this best practice.

Scholarly activity is also developed collaboratively between students within the work they do with employers and industry specialists. The employer mentor panel initiative encourages career development and employability, and allows students to see the breadth of the industries and make contact with potential employers or advisers, building on their networking skills. The graduate mentor panel also effectively raises awareness of the sorts of roles taken up by recent graduates. Students actively use the Mentor Panel of industry experts to garner advice relating to module choice and future careers. These initiatives contribute very effectively to the high levels of progression to employment, particularly highly skilled employment, or further study, with core metrics on these measures consistently reporting college student outcomes significantly above benchmark. We were very pleased to be invited again to present this area of best practice at the ACP conference in 2018.

Personalised Learning (LE3)

Students' academic experiences are specifically tailored to individual goals and career ambitions, leading to outstanding rates of retention, attainment and progression. Academic support is highly personalised, extensive and encompasses the wide range of additional support services available to all HE students.

Students take ownership of their academic journey and record their personal performance on the college-wide eILP system, ProMonitor. Through the additional contact time allocated to the tutorial system and small class sizes, tutors support students in the setting and reviewing of SMART targets that facilitate the development of the student both academically and professionally. This system is accessible in real time, and remotely, by students ensuring that they can monitor their progress and self-assess where they are in relation to their learning goals. Student support staff also use ProMonitor to record support provided from, for example, study support teams, the

student counsellor or the careers team. Course teams use ProMonitor to track students' achievements, and course leaders use the system to record tutorial discussions and HE PDP meetings. This holistic approach to recording support allows for careful consideration of all relevant matters when targets are agreed and ensures that an achievable, but challenging personalised learning programme is designed for each individual student.

The effectiveness of student tracking, and the extent to which personalised target setting is being used appropriately by all teachers and students, is evaluated during performance management meetings held on a six-weekly basis and led by a senior manager. Students can be flagged 'at risk' of non-achievement and early intervention plans agreed to enable to students to get back on track. This highly personalised support, coupled with timely intervention and the provision of a wide range of additional support services leads directly to improved retention (by 6pp to 88% in 2016-17) and student attainment (34% of students achieving a first class honours degree compared to 20% at our validating HEI).

The core metric for continuation is 89.6%, 3.6pp above benchmark and is positively flagged. Further analysis of the split metrics show that the indicator for years 2 and 3 remain above 90% at 6.1pp (year 2) and 4.1pp (year 3) above benchmark. A rigorous institutional approach to enhancing the academic experience and improving student outcomes have driven forward improvement in retention by 6pp to 88%. This further demonstrates the effectiveness of quality assurances process in tracking student progress, providing early intervention and support where required, the impact of increased dialogue and communication strategies between students and the tutor, enabling the swift identification and advice on resolution of student issues.

Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

Employment and Further Study (SO1)

Students achieve their educational and professional goals with TEF core metrics reporting that 94.6% graduates are in work or further study six months following graduation. Split metrics show that despite an increase of graduates between years 2 and 3 the metric has increased by 5.4pp to 97.5% and 2.5pp above TEF benchmark. Of those FT undergraduate leavers in employment, core metrics show 73% were in HSE, 6pp higher than benchmark, resulting in a positive flag. Positive flags can be seen in the split metrics for HSE for young, white and male students.

With small graduating cohorts, the difference between the numerator and denominator accounts for only 11 graduates not employed at the time of the survey over the 3 years. These 11 students have been identified from the individualised student data files provided by TEF. Our internal data is able to account for all 11 students;

- one student had cancer in the final year of study, completed the programme successfully but underwent further treatment after graduation and was therefore unable to work,
- one student progressed immediately into a level 6 top-up programme at the college and is therefore classified incorrectly as unemployed,
- seven students were unemployed when surveyed but all gained highly skilled positions within 7 - 9 months following graduation,
- two students progressed to top up degree courses at another institution but withdrew prior to the survey, they both gained employment within 9 months of graduating from College in highly skilled roles.

The timing of the DLHE survey does not allow an accurate representation of all students' destinations and this is not a new or unexplored concept within the sector. In May 2016, HESA launched a consultation to help determine what should replace the current DLHE survey, as part of the fundamental review of destinations and outcomes data. Of particular interest are the responses to questions regarding the timing of the survey. The strongest preference was for a 12-

month survey point, followed by 18 months highlighting a clear majority in favour of a longer gap. In March 2017, HESA launched its second consultation as part of the NewDLHE survey. The model proposed that graduates are surveyed 15 months after graduation. This is a significant change from the current DLHE survey timing of 6 months. The consultation report states, “the sector supported the move to a later point and, in principle, to a 15-month survey.” We echo the primary positive point raised regarding the new survey: the survey will provide a greater reflection of a graduate’s situation at 15 months as opposed to 6 months.

Taking into account what is known about those graduates internally, those students did, in fact, progress successfully. As can be seen in the table below, this results in a new core metric indicator of 99.5% against a benchmark of 94.9%, 4.6pp above the benchmark. This would indicate a further positive flag within the core metrics, giving an initial hypothesis of Gold.

Metric: Employment or further study	**Year 1 (2015)**	**Year 2 (2016)**	**Year 3 (2017)**		
Re-calculated Numerator	48	75*	80	**Benchmark**	**94.9%**
Original Denominator	48	76	80	**Re-calculated Core Metric Indicator**	**99.5%**
Re-calculated Indicator	100%	98.7%	100%	**Difference**	**+4.6**

* one student not employed due to undergoing treatment for cancer.

The college contributes to excellent graduate outcomes by focusing on employability across all programmes, working individually with students to identify and support progress towards their employment aspirations, monitor student academic and professional progress and provide excellent teaching, assessment strategies and high quality feedback that enables outstanding levels of progress and development.

The impact of this is reflected in student outcomes despite 64% of students accessing college HE having low to non-tariff on entry (27% low tariff and 37% non-tariff) and 35% being typically from disadvantaged backgrounds (POLAR quintiles 3 or below). Achievement rates have risen from 6pp above the validating university benchmark for to 21pp above and have risen 13pp in 2016-17, from 75% in 2015-16 to 88% in 2016-17.

Information on degree classifications is recorded centrally and is used to benchmark against the validating university’s own undergraduate cohort. College HE students achieve outstanding grades and higher-grade profiles than the validating university. External examiners regularly comment upon the outstanding performance of our students:

“I am particularly pleased with student performance. The standard of work on both programmes of study is high across modules and is comparable to student work on similar programmes that I am familiar with. Furthermore, the standard of critical writing and use of research findings by your students is very encouraging and often above the standard of student performance in other UK institutions. This is a testament to the teaching staff and an area that I feel is particularly important given the skills expected and required in a graduate.” (External Examiner comment).

The part-time core metrics identified a single negative flag for highly skilled employment. This flag is at odds with the overall picture. Core metric data shows an indicator in the bottom 10% of absolute performance; the college indicator is 50%, 29.8pp below benchmark. Further analysis of the TEF workbook shows the population of year 3 is comprised of 16 students. Of those 16 students, the TEF individual student files show that six are employed in highly skilled work, two are in further study, 1 student classified as “other” and seven are classified as in work.

The college strongly believes that this metric does not accurately reflect this cohort of students. The two students currently studying are doing so at the college to “top-up” to level 6. It is the

design of those programmes to have a qualification point upon first graduation, after which the students are surveyed for the DLHE. All other students that graduate from the top-up programmes are in highly skilled employment and we expect these two students to be the same. The one student classified as "other" is on maternity leave. Of particular note are the seven students that are classified as in work (5223 metal working production and maintenance fitters), but not highly skilled work. These seven students studied HNC Electrical Engineering and attended college to complete a programme that has been specifically designed for their employer, BMW. The HNC is a qualification that allows the students to gain promotion and leadership roles within their workplace. They are in employment throughout their studies and continue that employment and training with the employer upon graduation. They are therefore unable to be in highly skilled employment until they complete their training with that employer. This situation impacts negatively on the highly-skilled employment metric and the additional evidence provided mitigates against the negative flag.

Employability/ Transferable Skills (SO2)

Students very effectively acquire knowledge, skills and attributes that are valued by employers and that enhance their personal and professional lives as evidenced by the considerably higher than benchmark rates of progression into highly skilled employment or further study. In March 2014, the QAA Higher Education review of provision identified the strength of employer relationships as a feature of good practice demonstrated by the College:

'Employers described strong relationships with the College and indicated that the College is highly focused upon producing graduates who meet their needs. Some long-term relationships have been built with major employers who report that graduates from the College have developed to become highly effective in their roles within their companies.'

Students are very well prepared by their programme to achieve their educational and professional goals, and consequently achieve outstanding rates of progression into highly skilled employment or further study. These very successful outcomes for students are achieved through a variety of initiatives that start with very effective and consultative course design. Employers are involved at all stages of new course design, including initial general consultation about likely demand for highly skilled graduates in their sector, moving on to more specific detailed work that directly informs module design and starts to define course content. On-going evaluation of the relevance of existing provision to the skills needed by industry is undertaken on regular basis, through annual course review. The College also holds regular employer engagement events, where teaching staff, local and national industry experts are given the opportunity to further contribute towards course design and review. One such example is the launch of the HNC Operations Engineering programme, designed exclusively for BMW. Through close collaboration with the BMW team and Pearson, the college developed and now delivers a unique HNC programme for BMW.

The evidence of the excellent development of students' employability skills can be seen in feedback from employers. *"I am constantly impressed by how inspired [student x] is by her lessons. She returns from College full of ideas and suggestions, and has become very argumentative – but in a good way!" "[Student Y] is developing excellent employability skills. I have noticed a particular difference in her subject knowledge – which is to be expected – but also in her self-confidence, her willingness of embrace change and wider perspectives, and her ability to influence her team."*

External examiners have also commented on the curriculum design and its impact on the development of both critical and transferable skills: *"Both curriculum design and delivery include a range of learning environments and assessment methods that encourage independent learning and focus on both subject specific knowledge and development of transferable skills. Students are encouraged to engage in critical assessment and intellectual argument and I have also observed ethical consideration included in many of the samples of work. Students are encouraged to*

develop graduate and key transferable skills in the constructive feedback given by staff." [External Examiner, BSc Equine Science].

In addition to employer consultation, all HE programmes are mapped against graduate attributes, a series of abilities, dispositions or qualities that we expect our graduates will possess, in addition to their qualification. The result is a curriculum that provides extensive opportunities for students to develop these attributes enhancing their employability and potential contribution to society. Work placements are a distinctive feature within each programme and a wide range of projects and dissertations are completed by students, typically in collaboration with local, regional and international employers. The inclusion of live briefs enables students to work with employers on real-life scenarios.

The outstanding commitment to preparing students for work and to be active citizens has been nationally recognised. The AoC Beacon Awards, capture and celebrate the best and most innovative practice amongst UK further education colleges. The College has won four Beacon Awards recognising exceptional leadership and governance, development of students' employability skills, responsiveness to local employers and innovative approaches to improving teaching and learning.

In addition to the Beacon Awards, the College also won a Queen's Anniversary Prize. These prestigious prizes are awarded every two years to universities and colleges who submit work judged to show excellence, innovation, impact and benefit for the institution itself and for people and society generally in the wider world. The College won the Prize for our unique training programme for the equine industry, combined with commercial breeding of thoroughbreds. Jo Johnson, then Minister for Universities and Science commented: *"The UK is a world leader in science and research and The Queen's Anniversary Prizes celebrate the achievements of our universities and colleges. The outstanding academics recognised with these awards bring benefits to the everyday lives of millions of people in the UK and deserve this high honour for their work."*

Positive Outcomes for All (SO3)

As confirmed by the QAA during the HE Review in 2014, the college provides "an accessible, supportive and responsive ethos [which] empowers students from different backgrounds to develop and succeed." Exceptional student outcomes for all students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, further supports this judgement.

The achievement data of all students is evaluated by course teams as part of the annual review and course review process. Senior managers routinely identify and monitor gaps in attainment by diverse cohorts. Gaps in achievement between specific groups of students are analysed and action plans put in place to generate improvements if necessary. A robust and holistic review of all HE student achievement takes place on an annual basis, with reports made to the college senior manager team and then further interrogated by the Curriculum and Quality Committee of the Board of Governors. Careful scrutiny and evaluation such as this has ensured that no significant gaps in attainment exist between particular groups of HE students.

Generous contact time, small class sizes and regular 1-1 tutorials across all programmes ensure that all students are supported effectively irrespective of their background or personal circumstances. Close working relationships are established between lecturers and students which fosters an environment in which students are able to request help and support with their studies. Extensive study support is available for all students irrespective of whether a student qualifies for Disabled Student Allowance. Professional support from counsellors and welfare advisors is also made available where appropriate and 100% of students, supported effectively through mitigating circumstances during 2016-17, were able to complete their studies and graduate with a positive outcome. The College appointed a specialist disabled access consultant to undertake a DDA audit

of all its sites. The recommendations of the DDA audit report were implemented in full. As a result, students and staff of all disabilities can access 100% of the College's teaching facilities.

The split metrics show one negative flag for disabled students in the academic support metric with an indicator of 60.6% against a benchmark of 79%. Although this relates to only 23 students over the three-year period it nevertheless highlights dissatisfaction in 9 students. Closer scrutiny indicates that a number of these students were part of the FD Animal Behaviour and Welfare cohort which expressed overall dissatisfaction with the speed of feedback. As outlined previously (TQ4) this was an isolated issue which was swiftly resolved and did not have an adverse effect on student outcomes.

The number of students in any one ethnic category is low. Only 14 students are black and 13 are Asian. Therefore, the indicator is affected by only one student not satisfied or two students not in employment. Nevertheless, Asian students are particularly satisfied with the teaching on their course (2.6% above benchmark) and academic support (4.8% above benchmark).

The BME metrics from the TEF workbook show minimal data. In the metrics for black students the continuation indicator is below benchmark. This is partly due to low numbers, where only 13 students contribute to the metric over the three years. Of the 13 students, 4 students did not continue into year 2. Reasons for withdrawal and non-continuation are known and include: relocation, inability to secure student funding due to prior degree attainment, visa issues and pregnancy. Despite apparent decreases in continuation for mature and BME students, the small data sets for these students and further scrutiny highlight no significant differences and have not resulted in a flag generated.

Student Contribution to TEF

Students make a major contribution to the College and to their own academic development. Their feedback is invaluable and we empower them to use their voice to make change. As part of the TEF year 3 submission, we invited them to comment about any aspects of their programme they wished to mention. The following sections are comments from the students, written in their own words:

Teachers regularly bring in ideas from all subjects to encourage students to think more laterally of a subject. Teachers are regularly engaging and fun which encourage a better learning environment, which also allows a friendly debate scenario to other perspectives and beliefs. A range of perspectives are regularly used to justify not only scientific but cultural and economic/political perspectives too when relevant. Many lectures are referenced with older and recent studies, keeping the course in line with industry standards, whilst also considering its historic development to its current state. Tuition is regularly taking on board individual needs which students have expressed their gratitude for (Students studying FD Animal Behaviour and Welfare).

The lecturers' industry experience is invaluable and it's very good to learn from people with first hand insight in the industry I'm keen to go into. They are informed and clearly know a lot about the topic which makes learning and progression 100% easier. I always take something new away from lessons, which will impact me and my theory work further. I learn a lot in these sessions (Students studying Creative Arts programmes).

Lectures cover the material in a dynamic level of depth. A general level and then further in depth or less if required by the class. They are excellent lecturers, teaching us with enthusiasm every time they come in. They answer every question we have happily (Students studying Engineering).

As a student I get to do research, practice what I need to and report on it. I love the inclusion of papers and the relaxed atmosphere in discussing them to help me gain better knowledge. I found the most interesting parts of modules to be the evaluation based on scientific literature that can be used in assignments. Content in sessions is relevant and interesting with a great teaching style

and real life input. Lecturers are very passionate about topics and that makes it great for group discussion. Classes are a pleasure to attend! (Student studying BSc Equine Science).

Feedback from assignments is given back to students within a 2 week period, which is really helpful as it gives us an indication on what may need to work on the improve in future assignments. Feedback is always really good and valuable. For me, when I get feedback it makes me want to improve my next assignment on work on my areas of development. (Students studying Business).

Reading the Foundation Degree Early Years at Abingdon and Witney College has been a very positive experience because of the dedication of the staff. This course has been beyond amazing so far! The Foundation Degree Early Years course is the most efficient high quality course that I have ever had the privilege to be on. I very much enjoy it and I don't know where my practice would be if it wasn't for the education that I am receiving here at Abingdon and Witney College. (Student studying FD Early Years)

As a result of the course, our practice has greatly improved through the many things we have learnt, and it has also changed the way of thinking for the better! We want to help the children in our care thrive and develop as much as possible; now, we feel much more confident that we can do so (Students studying FD Early Years).

Conclusion

The TEF metrics are only able to tell only a small part of the highly effective, evidence based and impact driven, data informed approaches we undertake to ensure excellence in teaching outstanding student outcomes. The College recognises and embraces what the metrics show.

Internal measures of student satisfaction continue to maintain an upward trajectory across ‘teaching on my course’, ‘assessment and feedback’ and ‘academic support’, despite issues associated with the collection of NSS in 2016-17, highlighting the impact of the responses we have made to student feedback. The NSS survey remains an imperfect measure of student satisfaction from providers with small cohorts and numerous top-up programmes, and does not accurately reflect the satisfaction from the student body.

Continuation, employment and highly skilled employment continue to demonstrate excellence for the College. The impact is clearly demonstrated by the significantly above benchmark levels of students continuing on programme and entering highly skilled employment. The TEF metrics did not capture those 8 students who gained employment immediately after the DLHE survey took place; inclusion of these student destinations resulted in a 99.5% indicator for employment or further study which would lead to a positive flag for this metric and a hypothesis of Gold. We will continue to build on this success with the development of effective and impact driven interventions to provide the best possible outcomes for all students.

Looking forward, the College continues to develop its HE provision, with growth in HE highlighted as a specific strategic imperative. In particular, we are leading the development in Oxfordshire of higher level and degree apprenticeships building on our recent Ofsted Outstanding judgement of our apprenticeship provision (January 2017).

“The HE lecturers are doing a fantastic job! I could literally feel the neurons in my brain re-connecting after years away from academic studies - this boosted my confidence and self-esteem and as the course continued and my knowledge and understanding grew, I felt empowered in my role and inspired to make positive changes. I was unsure at the start as to whether I would be able to do it, but I have proven to myself I can, and there is no greater feeling than self-accomplishment.” [Current HE student]