



HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy

2021-25

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Introduction

The quality of learning, teaching and assessment delivered in the UK by HE providers is monitored by the Office for Students (OfS) through its Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes framework (TEF). Their four objectives of ensuring the best experience for students through participation, experience, outcomes and value for money are the drivers that underpin the key themes of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy at South Essex College.

The six key themes within this Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy are the recognition that the university experience is not the same for every student, coming as they do from very diverse backgrounds, (Byram 2018), the move within Higher Education away from a focus on teaching to an emphasis on learning (Ashwin 2015) and the need to demonstrate the societal relevance of curriculum delivery as education increasingly takes place in a knowledge-based economy, with transferable skills (Pinheiro et al 2015). Within the SEC strategy, the involvement of stakeholders, the role of student placement and the widening participation of students with a variety of experiences enables curriculum development to enrich the community, as well as the students, ensuring that students not only receive the relevant subject knowledge intended to develop their own understanding, but that it is strongly sector focused (Howell et al 2020).

The strategy also emphasises student engagement - identified as a defining characteristic of high quality teaching and learning in higher education (Ashwin and McVitty 2015). The 2011 UK Higher Education White Paper 'Students at the heart of the system' (BIS 2011) emphasised student engagement as a key element in the development of learning communities. The HEA framework for student access, retention, attainment and progression (2015) identifies that "Inclusive learning and teaching recognises all student's entitlement to a learning experience that respects diversity, enables participation, removes barriers and anticipates and considers a variety of learning needs and preferences." Ashwin and McVitty (2015) discuss the hierarchy of student engagement, from the formation of student understanding, through their part in the formation of curricula, and then to the formation of communities both within the institution and the locality. It is the intention of the SEC Learning, Teaching and Assessment strategy is to encompass all of these areas, and provide an educational experience that provides students with the opportunity to achieve success whatever their background or circumstances.

Pedagogy and assessment

The strategy is based on a transition pedagogical approach, which scaffolds students as they move from Further Education into Higher Education, and as they progress through their programme of study. This addresses the diverse needs of the students, and facilitates a sense of engagement, support and belonging while developing their academic and personal skills. (Broughan and Hunt 2012).

Assessment methods are varied in order to support this transition pedagogy, increasing in complexity through the programme. Formative and summative assessments include essays, portfolios, exams, presentations, case studies, as well as practical and placement assessments. Quality of assessment alongside that of learning and teaching is ensured through module moderation to ascertain that Learning Outcomes match the assessment, and link to the grading criteria of the awarding institutions. Internal second marking and moderation and External Examiner moderation assess the application of this to the student work. Quality of delivery is assessed through both the College's formal observation procedure and the more informal peer observation process, together with student feedback at Programme Boards, module evaluations and the National Student Survey. This also enables the student voice to be part of a collaborative process. Other quality assurance is gained through monitoring of high grades and degree classifications awarded as per OfS metrics, and the TEF. Currently, the TEF is undergoing a review (consultation timed for Autumn 2021), and the Learning,

Teaching and Assessment strategy at South Essex College will respond appropriately to any changes or recommendations that result from this.

Covid-19

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic and in accordance with official guidelines, teaching moved initially to online delivery via Microsoft Teams, and then to a 50:50 model, with students receiving half of their input online, and half face to face in the classroom. Assessments were adapted and modified in consultation with the awarding institutions to ensure that no student was placed at a disadvantage.

Re-learning the landscape

Legislation, regulation, marketisation, funding, value for money and putting students first have informed HE learning, teaching and assessment (HE LTA) recently, albeit balanced with institutional autonomy (with regulatory constraints) and academic freedom. This can be seen in the approach adopted by the Higher Education and Research Act 2017, the Office for Students regulation and requirements for registration, Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), Access and Participation Plans (APPs), with regulation underpinned by a principles-based model (hence providing a degree of autonomy to providers) and behavioural expectations.

This has necessitated a data-led approach that informs a HE LTA strategy and increases the drive for ensuring and assuring a current, engaging, inclusive, valued, sector and outcomes focused approach. This plays to our strengths as a College provider of HE, with:

- small class sizes enable personalised, individual attention, with a learner-centred focus providing a variety of active learning opportunities.
- a curriculum that is designed to meet the needs of our students
- high contact hours
- sector experienced practitioners within the teaching team
- development of employability and academic skills embedded within the programmes
- recognition of the barriers, challenges and different journeys faced by a diverse cohort from different backgrounds.

Delivering the changes

Structure and sustainability

The majority of the full-time HE provision is based within the Faculty of HE – a Faculty with a structure that is responsive to the student voice and comprised of staff that hone their academic and practical skills through engaging with professional development, maintaining subject expertise and currency and valuing students as partners and co-creators of their learning. The underpinning characteristics that define the LTA strategy include the following:

- **Themes**, with an associated implementation framework:
 - *1. Celebrating Diversity*: this theme is informed by the student demographic, APP priorities and metrics (and associated TEF metrics, with benchmarks).
 - *2. Critical self-awareness*: this, when combined with themes 4 and 5, provides students with the tools and capabilities to identify their potential and align it to their aspirations (often students either over or under-estimate their capabilities or potential relative to their existing experience and skills set).
 - *3. Active engagement*: this provides a high degree of academic enfranchisement to students, many of whom have previously had disrupted journeys in education or faced a range of barriers to learning or experienced disadvantage (social, cultural and/or economic).
 - *4. Sector focus*: employability and investment in human capital are the drivers that provide currency for our students entering the graduate market.

- *5. Student journey:* students are provided with commensurate support and study skills to successfully transition across levels of a course and by the end of their programme have potential to progress onto post-graduate study.
- *6. Value:* value for money, in its many forms, underpins students', taxpayers' and regulators' expectations of higher education and the College seeks to ensure this is achieved throughout the extended student lifecycle and therefore draws on themes 1 to 5 above.
- **Externality** through peer review with validating partners. In practice this means the following:
 - This Strategy is peer reviewed by experts in learning, teaching and assessment to ensure and assure a clear impact focus.
 - Delivery is triangulated through peer observations by subject specialists from validating partners.
 - Peer review of staff development as a vehicle for continuous improvement of the student academic experience, learning, teaching and assessment.
- **Data-led:** many of the themes are informed by data, monitored against targets and data and evaluated against relevant metrics for the College. This is pivotal to realising the benefits from this Strategy.

Realising the benefits

Success characteristics for stakeholders:

Students receive an education that they value, relevant study and employability skills that allow them to progress and an experience that adds to their social mobility and cultural capital.

Employers receive graduates that are independent learners, have currency, skills, aptitude and the ability to succeed in their chosen career demonstrating resilience.

College is valued in the community for providing a high quality student academic experience and thereby contributing to the local and regional economy.

Taxpayers, through effectively embedded transparency, can see value for money demonstrated at the College relative to the HE sector.

Regulator metrics are achieved and requirements met and a timely manner with effective allocation of resources.

References

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Overarching goal: As part of our Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy (and wider commitment), we seek to recruit a diverse body of students, develop their capability of being critically self-aware, facilitate active engagement in the curriculum and support them throughout their student journey with us, ensuring they become sector focused and as a result value the quality of teaching they receive from the Faculty of Higher Education.

Theme		Aim	Objective	Implementation (activity and responsibility)	Success measure/outcome
1.	Celebrating diversity	Students from varied cultural, socio-economic and academic backgrounds are valued and bring diversity to the curriculum and learning experience.	Recruitment of students with diverse backgrounds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff going into schools to deliver Experience days Trade-fairs Recognise prior-learning and experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase recruitment onto HE programmes for 2021-22 to a minimum of 251 students of which 9.5% are BAME. Access and Participation projects that are targeted to underrepresented areas are monitored each term and evaluated at the end of the project.
			Widen Participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Widening Participation Officer Outreach programmes 	
			Create a sense of community and support network between staff and students. Both parties valuing contributions that each brings to the learning experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student reps HE Programme Boards Tutorials Student Engagement Officer Special Academic & Social Events (invitation of all students to talks) 	
2.	Critical self-awareness	Students develop their aspirations and exceed their perceived potential, recognising that measures of success are relative to each individual.	Students have access to support from their individual tutors and through the tutorial system of each programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small class sizes enabling access to programme team staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Increase National Graduate Outcomes survey response rate to a minimum of 55% * Increase Graduate exit survey response rate to 85% Analysis from the Graduate exit survey to inform targeted interventions NSS Academic support questions 12-14 to have a minimum overall satisfaction rate of 85%
			Strong support network beyond the course teams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Student Engagement Officer HE Student Support team including specific support for SEN needs 	

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase pass rate for modules after re-sits and to revisit targets based on comparing year to year Level 4 80% Level 5 90% Level 6 90% • Analysis of comparative student outcomes across the programme (outcome of early modules compared to latter modules) September 21 and to use targeted interventions to raise the pass rate. • *Increase continuation rate of students on HE programmes in 20-21 to 87% • *Increase attainment rate to be above 57% for 1st and 2.1 degree classifications
3.	Active engagement	Students are partners and co-creators of their learning journey, working in partnership with the programme team and other stakeholders to develop or enhance the curriculum.	<p>Students attend HE Programme Boards in order to inform, evaluate, critically reflect on and develop or enhance the curriculum and experienced learning.</p> <p>Stakeholders, such as external examiners, capture student feedback.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific agenda item for programme boards. • Evaluation of modules • Dialogue and feedback in tutorials and HE Programme Boards. • External examiners reports informing programme evaluations and variations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of evaluated modules • Increase NSS scores for questions 21-25 to a minimum aggregated score of 80%

			Students are active in the programme (re)validation preparations and associated events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Timetabled activities for student participation in programme (re)validations. 	
4.	Sector focus	Students are provided with a holistic educational experience that produces graduates able to demonstrate autonomy, creative thinking and who are highly employable.	Dedicated access to career and progression information, advice, guidance and support for higher education students throughout their time at the College.	<i>HE Careers Coordinators</i> <i>Industry weeks with guest speakers from the sector</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Increase National Graduate Outcomes survey response rate to a minimum of 55%
			Curriculum focusses on: (i) the acquisition of subject knowledge, (ii) development of employability and wider skills related to an associated sector, and (iii) encourages opportunities to share ideas with students on related courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diverse and industry experienced programme teams provide insight, currency, support and guidance to students in order to contextualise learning to their own desired pathway. Complementary optional workshops and short courses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Increase Graduate exit survey response rate to 85% Analysis from the Graduate exit survey to inform targeted interventions Attendance to be above 90%
			Guest speakers inspire and guide students on the next steps in their career pathways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Linked-In Teacher Training Providers Sector Experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Increase continuation rate of students on HE programmes in 20-21 to 87% * Increase attainment rate to be above 57% for 1st and 2.1 degree classifications NSS scores for questions 3-6 to be at a minimum aggregated score of 87%

5.	Student journey	Teaching and learning experiences are tailored to the diverse needs and initial skills base of students to provide effective transition into and throughout Higher Education.	Teaching strategies develop students' engagement with a wide range of materials.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Through enhancement, programme teams work to provide clear and direct access to relevant materials. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Increase attainment rate to be above 57% for 1st and 2.1 degree classifications Success rates from Year 2 to Year to be above 88% * Increase attainment rate to be above 57% for 1st and 2.1 degree classifications NSS scores for questions 1-2 to be at a minimum aggregated score of 88% NSS scores for questions 10-11 to be at a minimum aggregated score of 81%
			Teaching and learning strategies are designed to develop students' holistic skills, and support the neurodiversity within the different cohorts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning experience develops critical thinking, independence, teamwork, creativity, leadership and skills related specifically to the vocational discipline. 	
			Curriculum is delivered in a way that equips students with the skills and ability to make effective progress across each year of study.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Induction at each level Peer observations Study skills Subject specific workshops Complementary optional workshops. 	
6.	Value	Teaching quality represents value for money.	Aims 1 to 5 above inform (i) effective course design and currency, (ii) student support strategies throughout the student lifecycle, (iii) investment in learning resources and associated infrastructure.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive External Examiner reports. NSS overall satisfaction to be at a minimum of 82% NSS overall satisfaction for learning resources to be at a minimum of 72% Targets above for continuation, attainment and progression are met.
			The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) informs relevant elements of this Strategy.		

* Please note within these success measures there are access and participation specific targets to be met to meet the OfS Access and Participation targets.