



# HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy

2021-25

# **HE Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy**

## **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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## Higher Education Strategies: Glossary of terms

Active learning	A term for learning and teaching methods which put the student in charge of their own learning through meaningful activities. Students think about and apply what they are learning, in a deliberate contrast to passive learning where attention in lectures begins to wane every 10-20 minutes. Active learning promotes recall and deeper understanding of material as students are engaging with the content, rather than simply listening to it. Active learning can be a good way of preparing students for future employment. By integrating activities such as case studies and problem based learning scenarios into the teaching, students are able to practice skills which are essential for the workplace.
Active reflection	Looking back on an experience and considering what could have been done differently or what has been learned from it. When a student reflects on their accomplishments and the opportunities for improvement, they are better able to take on future challenges. Each learning experience becomes more meaningful and more productive.
AdvanceHE	A member-led, sector-owned charity that works with institutions and higher education bodies across the world to improve higher education for staff, students and society. Support is delivered through professional development programmes and events, Fellowships, awards, student surveys, and includes accreditation of teaching and learning, equality charters, research, and the sharing of knowledge and resources.
Cultural capital	'The essential knowledge that students need to be educated citizens, introducing them to the best that has been thought and said and helping to engender an appreciation of human creativity and achievement.' (Ofsted 2019)
Curriculum	In higher education, this refers to the process of connecting and integrating university learning and teaching into coherent and meaningful educational experiences for students, not just simply the programme of study.
Formative assessment	Activities used in a lesson in order to discover what students know while they're still in the process of learning it. This enables adaption to the teaching to ensure student's knowledge and understanding is reinforced.
HEA	The Higher Education Academy (HEA) was a British professional membership scheme promoting excellence in higher education. The HEA advocated for evidence-based teaching methods and awards fellowships as a method of professional recognition for university teachers. The HEA was responsible for the UK Professional Standards Framework for higher
	education practitioners. In 2018, the HEA merged with the Leadership Foundation and the Equality Challenge Unit to form Advance HE
HESA	The Higher Education Statistics Agency - the experts in UK higher education data, and the designated data body for England.

Human capital	An individual's capabilities, knowledge, skills and experience as well as the capacity to add to this reservoir of knowledge, skills, and experience through individual learning. Usually used to refer to the value of an employee to an organisation
Identity capital	'Identity capital is an individual's collection of personal assets. It is the repertoire of individual resources assembled over time. Some identity capital goes on a résumé, such as degrees, jobs, test scores, and clubs. Other identity capital is more personal, such as how we speak, where we are from, how we solve problems, how we look. Identity capital is how we build ourselves—bit by bit, over time.'(Jay 2013)
Learner centred	This refers to moving the focus of instruction from the teacher to the student. It aims to develop learner autonomy and independence. focuses on skills and practices that enable life-long learning and independent problem-solving
NERUPI	Network Evaluating and Researching University Participation Interventions. NERUPI is a community of practice for those seeking to reduce inequalities in higher education access, participation and progression - a partnership of over 70 higher education organisations working together to create a new approach to evaluation using the framework developed by Annette Hayton, University of Bath and Dr Andrew Bengry, Bath Spa University.
Neurodiversity	The concept that differences in brain functioning within the human population are normal and that brain functioning that is not neurotypical should not be stigmatized
OfS	Office for Students -the independent regulator of higher education in England. Helping students to get into and succeed in higher education by: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Helping students stay informed.</li> <li>2. Making sure that students get a high-quality education that prepares them for the future.</li> <li>3. Protecting students' interests.</li> </ol> The OfS's other functions include the administration of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and the Register of higher education providers.
Pedagogy	The theory and practice of teaching and learning , and how this process influences, and is influenced by, the social, political and psychological development of learners. Pedagogy, taken as an academic discipline, is the study of how knowledge and skills are imparted in an educational context.
Peer review	The evaluation of work by one or more people with similar competencies as the producers of the work (peers). It functions as a form of self-regulation by qualified members of a profession within the relevant field

Polar quintiles	<p>All universities are required by the Office for Students to increase the proportion of students they take from 'low participation' areas. One of the main ways they do this is to flag up on applications the '<b>Polar quintile</b>' the applicants live in. POLAR is an acronym which stands for Participation of Local Areas.</p> <p>POLAR classifies local areas into five quintiles based on the proportion of 18-year-olds who enter HE aged 18 or 19. <b>Quintile 1</b> is the fifth of areas with the lowest proportion of progression to HE.</p>
Psychological capital	The concept of Psychological Capital is strongly linked to increased mental wellbeing, and levels of satisfaction with life and work. The positive developmental state of an individual as characterized by high self-efficacy, optimism, hope and resilience.
Social capital	The links, shared values and understandings in society that enable individuals and groups to trust each other and so work together
Stakeholder	An individual or group that has an interest in any decision or activity of an organization.
Summative assessment	Summative assessments are any method of evaluation performed at the end of a module, or period of study, allowing teachers to measure a students' understanding against standardised criteria. They usually result in the student receiving a determined grade
TEF	<p>The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) is a national exercise, introduced by the government in England. It assesses excellence in teaching at universities and colleges, and how each higher education provider ensures excellent outcomes for their students in terms of graduate-level employment or further study. There are systems in place to help ensure that all UK colleges and universities meet national quality requirements.</p> <p>The TEF looks at what they are doing in addition to these requirements, and participating universities and colleges can achieve either gold, silver, bronze, or a provisional award (meaning that they do not yet have enough data for a full assessment).</p>
Transition pedagogy	An approach to learning and teaching that aims to support students as they enter higher education, and as they progress through their programme of study and beyond. It recognises that students have diverse needs and experiences and that these are addressed in order to ensure successful completion of a students HE journey.
UAL	University of the Arts, London.
UEA	University of East Anglia

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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"> <li>• Increase recruitment onto HE programmes for 2021-22 to a minimum of 251 students of which 9.5% are BAME.</li> <li>• Access and Participation projects that are targeted to underrepresented areas are monitored each term and evaluated at the end of the project.</li> </ul>
		Widen Participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff going into schools to deliver</li> <li>• Experience days</li> <li>• Trade-fairs</li> <li>• Recognise prior-learning and experience</li> </ul>	
		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"> <li>• Widening Participation Officer</li> <li>• Outreach programmes</li> <li>• Student reps</li> <li>• HE Programme Boards</li> <li>• Tutorials</li> <li>• Student Engagement Officer</li> <li>• Special Academic &amp; Social Events (invitation of all students to talks)</li> </ul>	
2.	Critical self-awareness	Students have access to support from their individual tutors and through the tutorial system of each programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small class sizes enabling access to programme team staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Increase National Graduate Outcomes survey response rate to a minimum of 55%</li> <li>• *Increase Graduate exit survey response rate to 85%</li> <li>• Analysis from the Graduate exit survey to inform targeted interventions</li> <li>• NSS Academic support questions 12-14 to have a minimum overall satisfaction rate of 85%</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
		Strong support network beyond the course teams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Engagement Officer</li> <li>• HE Student Support team including specific support for SEN needs</li> </ul>	

					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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%</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• * Increase continuation rate of students on HE programmes in 20-21 to 87%</li> <li>• * Increase attainment rate to be above 57% for 1st and 2.1 degree classifications</li> </ul>
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"> <li>• Specific agenda item for programme boards.</li> <li>• Evaluation of modules</li> <li>• Dialogue and feedback in tutorials and HE Programme Boards.</li> <li>• External examiners reports informing programme evaluations and variations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analysis of evaluated modules</li> <li>• Increase NSS scores for questions 21-25 to a minimum aggregated score of 80%</li> </ul>

			Students are active in the programme (re)validation preparations and associated events.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timetabled activities for student participation in programme (re)validations.</li> </ul>	
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"> <li>• *Increase National Graduate Outcomes survey response rate to a minimum of 55%</li> </ul>
			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"> <li>• Diverse and industry experienced programme teams provide insight, currency, support and guidance to students in order to contextualise learning to their own desired pathway.</li> <li>• Complementary optional workshops and short courses.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Increase Graduate exit survey response rate to 85%</li> <li>• Analysis from the Graduate exit survey to inform targeted interventions</li> <li>• Attendance to be above 90%</li> </ul>
			Guest speakers inspire and guide students on the next steps in their career pathways.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linked-In</li> <li>• Teacher Training Providers</li> <li>• Sector Experts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• *Increase continuation rate of students on HE programmes in 20-21 to 87%</li> <li>• *Increase attainment rate to be above 57% for 1st and 2.1 degree classifications</li> <li>• NSS scores for questions 3-6 to be at a minimum aggregated score of 87%</li> </ul>

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"> <li>Through enhancement, programme teams work to provide clear and direct access to relevant materials.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Increase attainment rate to be above 57% for 1st and 2.1 degree classifications</li> <li>Success rates from Year 2 to Year to be above 88%</li> <li>* Increase attainment rate to be above 57% for 1st and 2.1 degree classifications</li> <li>NSS scores for questions 1-2 to be at a minimum aggregated score of 88%</li> <li>NSS scores for questions 10-11 to be at a minimum aggregated score of 81%</li> </ul>
			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"> <li>Learning experience develops critical thinking, independence, teamwork, creativity, leadership and skills related specifically to the vocational discipline.</li> </ul>	
			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"> <li>Induction at each level</li> <li>Peer observations</li> <li>Study skills</li> <li>Subject specific workshops</li> <li>Complementary optional workshops.</li> </ul>	
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"> <li>Positive External Examiner reports.</li> <li>NSS overall satisfaction to be at a minimum of 82%</li> <li>NSS overall satisfaction for learning resources to be at a minimum of 72%</li> <li>Targets above for continuation, attainment and progression are met.</li> </ul>
			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.