Southport College Higher Education Strategy 2015-2018

Introduction

1. This paper presents a Strategy for higher education within Southport College for the period 2015/16 to 2017/18. Its overriding purpose is to support the growth of high quality higher education provision in Southport. It is intended to provide a direction and framework for the development of higher education programmes through the College in conjunction with its University partners.

2. The Higher Education Strategy is derived from Southport College’s strategic mission ‘to provide outstanding education and training for individuals and employers.’ Specifically it seeks to significantly expand the local range of opportunities for university level study while working towards the highest possible standards.

3. The Strategy aims to widen access to higher education, to meet the needs of key local employment sectors, and to support the economic and social regeneration of the sub-region. In particular it seeks to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by the establishment of a new University Centre which opened in September 2012 to provide a distinctive higher education experience within a college setting.

4. The Strategy aims to ensure that the planned growth of higher education provision is accompanied by an equal emphasis on maintaining high quality teaching & learning and support which enables students to achieve their full potential. It will combine the distinctive advantages of locally delivered HE in a supportive FE College environment with the higher learning and research ethos of a University.

Context

5. Southport is a seaside town with a population of about 91,000 (2011, Census). It lies within the Metropolitan Borough of Sefton, which had a population of 273,200 in 2013. The local catchment area for the College, which includes part of West Lancashire, has an overall population of 384,500.

6. Sefton is one of five metropolitan districts within Greater Merseyside. The unemployment rate in Sefton is 8.4% compared to 7.9% in the North West and 6.8% in the UK, whilst the unemployment claimant rate is 2.4% in Sefton compared to 2.2% in the North West and 2.1% in the UK (Nomis Labour Market Statistics: Oct 2014). The indices of multiple deprivation, produced as a means of comparing measures of deprivation in different areas, rank Sefton as the 92nd most deprived district out of 326 in England (Office of National Statistics, 2010).

7. Educational attainment of school leavers within Sefton is slightly below the national rate for state funded schools. In 2014 55% of school leavers gained 5 A*- C GCSEs including English and maths compared with 56.6% of state schools nationally. For Sefton and Merseyside the proportion of working age residents qualified at Level 3 and Level 4 is lower than the UK average (Nomis Labour Market Statistics 2013). Sefton residents are 4% less likely to have a Level 4 qualification and Merseyside is about 8% behind the overall UK proportion. Residents in Sefton and the North West region as a whole are less likely to hold a Level 4 qualification than those in other areas. (NW Skills Priorities Statement 2011-2012, Sefton Local Plan Publication Draft). The Liverpool City Region would need 67,065 more people qualified at Level 4 to meet England averages particularly in growth sectors (Liverpool City Region Annual Report 2013).

8. Much of the College’s Higher Education provision fits within the Liverpool City Region’s priority growth areas particularly within the Knowledge Economy including Creative & Digital Industries, Advanced Manufacturing, Life Sciences and Financial & Professional
Services and also in the other priority areas SuperPort, Low Carbon and Visitor Economy. Most of these areas for growth have key employment demands for higher level technical and management skills which can be filled by graduates and higher level apprenticeships (LCR Skills for Growth: Annual Report 2014/15). It is one of the Liverpool City Region’s strategic objectives to work towards linking Apprenticeships to Higher Education to ensure that apprenticeships meet the needs of the local economy particularly relating to the Knowledge Economy (Liverpool City Region: Apprenticeship Strategy & Key Actions).

9. In addition to the LCR’s priority growth areas there are two other sectors that are likely to be growing over the next few years; Construction and Health & Social Care. The investment in private housing, commercial and infrastructure will be contributing to a 2.5% annual growth in the Construction industry in the North West generating a need for nearly 5000 per year for the next 5 years (Industry Insights: Construction Skills NW 2015-2019). The number of jobs is set to also increase for the Health & Social Care sector due to the ageing population and lifestyle choices (parents going out to work), although the employment increases are likely to be in private company jobs due to constraints on public spending. Skills for Care have predicted an increase between 15% and 55% between now and 2025 depending on which of their predicted scenarios is the best fit (Skills for Care: NW Region Jan 2015). There is within the Health & Care Sector a shortage of staff with relevant managerial qualifications and expertise.

Background

10. Southport College is a medium sized further education college which offers a diverse range of predominantly vocational programmes through full time and part time courses and training for apprentices. The College has also developed as a central part of its provision for adults Access courses which provide progression to higher education.

11. HE provision is a well-established part of the curriculum offer of the College. Historically this provision has been modest in size and offered through a variety of partnership arrangements with local Universities.

12. In March 2011 the College was subject to the Integrated Quality Enhancement Review (IQER) carried out by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). This review gave the highest level of assurance to the College’s higher education provision and identified a number of areas of good practice. A small number of recommendations were proposed all of which have subsequently been implemented.

13. The College successfully bid to HEFCE in 2012 for core and margin places securing for the first time its ‘own’ HE numbers to manage alongside its franchised programmes. The initial allocation was 34 full time additional places for 2012/13 and by 2014/15 this had grown to 54 places.

14. The current (2014/15) HE curriculum consists of 10 distinct programmes offered through full-time and part-time courses (see attached Appendix 1 for a complete list). Courses include HNCs/HNDs, wholly managed by the College and validated by Pearson Edexcel, and a Foundation Degree & Teacher Education programmes delivered in partnership with the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan). The College is this academic year offering its first top-up to a BA Honours degree in Health and Social Care. This is offered in conjunction with the University of Chester.

15. Over the past three years the size of the HE student body has grown steadily from 99 funded students and 61 FTEs in 2011/12 to 173 funded students and 141 FTEs in 2014/15.

16. In year retention rates for HE programmes in 2013/14 were 79.22% for first year students and 98.33% for second year students with an overall completion rate of 79.73%.

17. The College response rate for latest National Student Survey (NSS) is above the national rate with overall satisfaction above the national mean. The College satisfaction rate scores are on or above the top quartile for the teaching on my course, assessment and feedback,
academic support, organisation and management, and personal development. The score for learning resources is below the top quartile and on national rate.

18. In August 2012 the College opened a new University Centre based around a sizeable library/learning resource centre, modern classrooms and a dedicated area for HE students. This is supplemented by well-equipped facilities for photography and graphic design housed in the College’s School of Media & Arts.

19. This Strategy seeks to build on previous strategies and recognises the increasing significance of higher education provision within the overall make up of Southport College and the importance of creating and embedding a distinctive HE ethos and experience.

Aims and objectives

20. The Strategy is based around five core aims:

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<tr>
<th>Aims</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
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| 1. To enable students to aspire and succeed through providing the highest quality HE learning opportunities in an environment which is both supportive and challenging | 1.1 To be in the top quartile in the National Student Survey for overall student satisfaction and in all main categories  
1.2 To work towards an overall completion rate of 85% or above  
1.3 To raise the proportion of students achieving a merit or distinction to 70% or above  
1.4 To aim to achieve national rates or above for good honours degrees (2:1 or above)  
1.5 To ensure HE teaching & learning will be consistently good or outstanding through teacher training, observation and feedback, peer review, staff development and targeted intervention and support  
1.6 To ensure the consistent implementation of University assessment procedures  
1.7 To monitor student attendance and achievement and implement strategies to support at risk students  
1.8 To provide a supportive tutorial structure which sets challenging targets and encourages learner independence |
| 2. To grow our HE provision and student numbers through widening participation, and access, targeted advice and guidance and providing clear progression opportunities for young people and adults into higher education | 2.1 To ensure that accurate and timely information regarding the HE offer, including costs and support, is available through the website, prospectus, open events and College guidance services  
2.2 To achieve the planned target for the growth of HE provision over the three-year period to 250 FTEs or above  
2.3 To increase progression of sixth form students through widening the curriculum offer and through providing enhanced advice and guidance.  
2.4 To strengthen progression opportunities for adult returners through the increased use of access programmes, targeted advice and guidance and flexible delivery mechanisms  
2.5 To increase the number top up degrees across all curriculum areas  
2.6 To develop higher level apprenticeship programmes and linked provision to support the progression of advanced apprentices  
2.7 To raise aspirations locally by demonstrating progression routes from options taken at 14 right through to degree level study in Southport |
| 2.8 | To increase the proportion of students accessing HE from the lowest participation areas |
| 3.1 | To enable graduate progression into employment or higher study aiming to be on or above against national rates for graduate prospects |
| 3.2 | To guarantee that all HE students will have the opportunity to experience at least one of the following as part of their course:  
- a work placement or internship  
- a live brief linked to an external client  
- a research project  
- a careers module |
| 3.3 | To work closely with employers and their associations to develop relevant specialist provision and pathways |
| 3.4 | To encourage employers input into curriculum design and delivery |
| 3.5 | To embed digital literacy into the curriculum and study support |
| 3.6 | To strengthen pre course, on course and post course careers guidance |
| 4.1 | To further develop the HE Library Learning Centre to ensure that students have access to the core learning resources and the information seeking skills they need for their studies |
| 4.2 | To ensure that the College’s Accommodation strategy reflects the planned growth in HE numbers and the further enhancement of a distinctive HE ethos |
| 4.3 | To further develop the VLE (Moodle) as key repository for learning resources and information for HE students |
| 4.4 | To continue to invest in updating, new technology, and specialist equipment in response to student needs and expectations |
| 5.1 | To continue to listen to students, to actively seek and collect their feedback and respond appropriately with the prime intention of enhancing their learning experience |
| 5.2 | To strengthen student involvement in quality assurance and quality improvement through specific action research pilots |
| 5.3 | To support students in developing their own structures for student engagement, support and enrichment through for example a Students Union or an HE specific Student Council |
| 5.4 | To support scholarly activity and professional practice to maintain and enhance academic standards across all programmes |
| 5.5 | To provide those staff teaching and supporting HE with relevant development opportunities, making use where appropriate of the expertise and support of our University partners |
| 5.6 | To work with University partners to promote and enhance research capability and to ensure that research proposals are approved, supported and disseminated |
| 5.7 | To ensure that all HE teaching staff are teacher trained and to encourage, through staff development support, HE staff seeking to undertake relevant |
Strategic Management & Leadership of HE

21. The College’s Governing Board holds the responsibility for the approval of the Higher Education Strategy. They will in approving the strategy consider its place in and impact on the College overarching strategic direction and strategic planning.

22. The overall responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the Higher Education Strategy lies with the College Executive Team. They are responsible for regular reporting to Governors on progress. The level of nature of these reports particularly to Standards Committee would be considered as part of the annual review of the Committee’s Terms of Reference.

23. CET are ultimately responsible for HE Quality and Academic Standards. In this they are supported by the Colleges Quality Manager who oversees Awarding Body requirements and is the named staff nominee for QAA HE Reviews.

24. The College has a Higher Education Manager who reports to the Head of Adult Learning. This post provides a link between University partners and Curriculum Leaders and their respective Heads of Department. The Manager also takes a significant role in supporting quality assurance and quality improvement, including facilitating the HE learner voice activities and responses.

25. The College has a well-established Quality Improvement Group (QIG) which has responsibility for the validation and monitoring of annual self-assessment reports, responding to issues arising out of the observation system of teaching and learning, overseeing the preparation for external accreditation and influencing the direction and content of staff development. More recently a HE Quality Group has been established as a sub group of QIG. Their role is to focus specifically on HE quality and curriculum issues and in doing so to support QIG with its wider remit.

26. Academic quality is ensured by the consistent implementation of University assessment procedures and Awarding Body requirements. College staff on HE programmes, supported by the HE manager, will participate in exam boards and validations.

27. The College has a teaching and learning strategy based around a teacher devised teaching and learning model which is applicable to higher education. Consideration will be given to further developing and refining this model to better support best practice in higher level teaching and learning. Staff development arising out of the strategy will form part of the College’s well established Inspiring Excellence programme.

28. The planning of the HE curriculum will be the responsibility of Heads of Department supported by the HE Manager and working within the existing frameworks for curriculum development. There will be a particular emphasis on developing effective pathways from level 3 to level 4 across relevant curriculum areas for 16-18 year olds and adults.

29. The College has a range of existing links with employers and is actively developing these through the implementation of its Employer Engagement Strategy. The involvement of employers in the design of flexible relevant HE programmes is recognised as a central element of the Higher Education Strategy.

30. The College has grown its apprenticeship provision and has an increasing number of advanced level apprentices. Particular consideration will be given in curriculum planning to...
working with employer forums and advisory bodies to develop relevant specialist higher level apprenticeships.

31. It is recognised that in attracting increased numbers of non-traditional HE students support mechanisms will need to be strong. The student focused features of current provision including strong individual tutorial support will need to be maintained and developed.

32. The active engagement of University partners is critical to the success of the HE strategy. It is recognised that whilst a range of University partners is helpful to support different specialisms and minimise risk, too many partnerships add an extra level of complexity to quality assurance and can be counterproductive. To this end the intention is to develop strong sustainable partnerships with two or three core University partners.