

# South Thames Colleges Group

## Access and participation plan

2020-21 to 2024-25

### 1. Assessment of performance

South Thames Colleges Group was formed on 1 August 2017 and comprises four colleges that are promoted and operate to the public, applicants and students under their geographical/historic titles - Carshalton College, Kingston College, Merton College and South Thames College.

The College Group merger was concluded under type B merger arrangements (governed by the Further Education Corporations (Publication of Proposals) (England) Regulations 2012, SI 2012 No. 1157) to create a new college group for South West London. Under these arrangements Carshalton and South Thames College (Merton College was at that point of time part of South Thames College following a previous merger) were dissolved and their property, rights and liabilities transferred to the remaining and successor college, Kingston. Kingston College, the successor body, subsequently proposed to the Secretary of State a name change for the Group to "South Thames Colleges Group" and this was approved and adopted from 1 December 2017.

South Thames Colleges Group is a General Further Education College delivering vocational education and skills training. In June 2018 the College Group was awarded Bronze, as part of the year 3 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) process, for a 3 year duration, and this has been further extended as part of the overall TEF review. In February 2020, the College Group's first full Ofsted inspection resulted in the awarding an overall grade of "Good".

The four colleges are situated in different London Boroughs each with different socio economic profiles. Kingston College is situated in Kingston town centre, in the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames. According to the Children and Young People's Plan for 2013-17 the Royal Borough describes itself as:

*"The 2011 Census estimated that 25.5% of the population came from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups, compared to 15.5% in 2001, and the borough is predicted to become more ethnically diverse over the next decade. However, Kingston remains less ethnically diverse than London as a whole, where over 40% of the population are from BAME groups. Kingston has significant numbers of Koreans, Tamils and Arabs relative to the size of its population. The borough also has the tenth highest percentage in England and Wales (10.7%) of households with multi-ethnicity partnerships. The school age population is estimated to be even more ethnically diverse: according to the 2012 Spring School Census, 35.7% of children living and attending a state school in Kingston came from BAME groups and 32% spoke English as an additional language. Kingston ranks as the third least deprived of all 33 London boroughs according to the 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation. However, there are extremes of advantage and disadvantage across the borough: for example, Kingston contains super output areas ranked within both the 2% most deprived and 2% least deprived in England for income deprivation affecting children. The people of Kingston are relatively healthy, affluent and well educated. The number of school leavers attaining 5 GCSEs at A\*-C, including English and Mathematics, is well above both the London and National average at 70.1 per cent (National average of 59.3% and London 62.3%)"*

The local educational environment is competitive with 6<sup>th</sup> forms in all local secondary schools, Grammar Schools and independent provision.

Kingston College's whole student population (FE, HE, Adults et.) is significantly different to that of Kingston, with approximately 50 per cent of learners from minority ethnic groups. Learners are recruited from a wide area of South West London and the average travel to learn is in excess of 5 miles.

Carshalton College is situated in the London Borough of Sutton and the sole provider of HE in the borough. The College attracts learners locally primarily from the boroughs of Sutton, Merton and Croydon. Approximately 30% of the whole student cohort (FE, HE and Adults etc.) is from minority ethnic heritage backgrounds. The London Borough of Sutton's 2016/17 Economy Watch describes the borough;

*"The economy is in a good position, being one of only a few boroughs to experience population growth, with a professional workforce lending itself to a higher proportion of disposal income. This provides a good platform for future investment and developments where families have schools that are performing well and achieving excellent educational standards for children, performing above London and national averages. The economy attracts micro enterprises which are able to sustain and develop over the longer term being driven by a resourceful population driving the commercial and retail sectors forward. The overall health of Sutton's economy is in a resilient position to face new challenges and build."*

Merton College is situated in the London Borough of Merton. The London Borough of Merton's Economic Narrative Report of 2012 describes the Borough and recognises aspects of social and economic divide;

*"...strengths of the borough are that it is generally a very safe place, with good transport connection and relatively low level of deprivation and crime. This has been reflected in relatively high average house prices compared to London as a whole. However, the aggregate picture masks a significant divide between the west and the east of the borough (in which Merton College located). The west is a prominent employment location, with better transport connections, a more highly skilled population, an consequent levels of crime and deprivation. In contrast the east of the borough has poorer transport links, fewer numbers of jobs, a less highly skilled resident population a higher – though not high – levels of crime and deprivation. Whilst the east of the borough is not struggling in the same way that more seriously deprived parts of London are, the differences between the two halves of the borough are still jarring and suggest a need for economic strategy to focus on supporting opportunities for residents across the borough. Merton has many economic strengths, including a well-educated resident population, high average wage levels which can support local retail and leisure, an internationally recognised sporting venue and competition, and excellent transport links. Nonetheless, the poor employment growth record of the past decade shows that these strengths alone will not bring additional employment ."*

South Thames College operates from two campuses – Wandsworth High Street and the other in Tooting High Street – both in the London Borough of Wandsworth. The Borough of described itself, in May 2017, in its Economic and Prosperity Profile in the following words;

- *"Wandsworth has a very well qualified workforce, receiving above average earnings compared to other London residents. According to the 2011 UK Census, 53.6% of usual residents aged 16 and over had Level 4 qualifications and above (degree level or higher), the second highest proportion nationally outside the City of London.*
- *Correspondingly, the proportion of residents with no qualifications, Level 1 (1+ GCSE or equivalent) qualifications and Level 2 (5+ GCSEs Grade A to C or equivalent) were amongst the lowest in the country.*
- *33.1% of Wandsworth's full-time students aged 18 to 74 were also in employment, higher than the Inner London (28.7%) and London (31.4%) averages.*
- *Hours and Earnings - The Office of National Statistics' annual survey of hours and earnings (as shown on [www.nomisweb.co.uk](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk) Labour Market Report) found that the gross weekly pay of full time workers living in Wandsworth to be £689.70 compared to the London average of £613.30 and GB average of £508.*
- *According to a Local Futures Place Profile (© 2012) prosperity scoring, Wandsworth is ranked 7 out of 408 districts on a prosperity score, indicating incomes amongst the resident population in the top 20% of districts nationally. "At £49,500, the average total income in Wandsworth is well above the national median, with the area ranking in the top 20% of districts nationally. By comparison, the London Central figure is £63,170 and the national figure is £26,845.*
- *At £535,290, the average house price in Wandsworth is very high, with the area ranking in the top 20% of districts nationally. By comparison the London Central figure is £718,039 and the national figure is £238,638*

In summary, the College Group sits within a relatively prosperous part of South West London, amongst a relatively diverse population. There are a small number of pockets of relative deprivation within the Group's catchment area.

### **Profile of HE provision at South Thames College Group**

The College is unusual due to the high number of its HE provider partners (seven); Kingston University; University of West London; University of Greenwich; Middlesex University; University of Roehampton; Canterbury Christchurch University; University of Northampton, plus Pearson's courses.

Indeed, the partnerships with these range of universities form part of the College Group's strategic approach to the provision of higher study opportunities to learners from widening participation groups and students from non-traditional routes. As a General Further Education College, without awarding body powers, these partnerships provide opportunities for learners to achieve, or Top Up L4 and 5 learning, to Full Honours Degrees either at the College Group, or with partners in locations, settings and environments well suited to learners progressing through an HE in FE environment.

These arrangements encompass more than fifty individual degree and sub-degree programmes ranging from Foundation Year Zero programmes to a post-graduate teaching certificate. Partners have been specifically chosen to complement the expertise of the College's Schools, as well as to widen the range of progression opportunities available to students. The provision of HE is embedded within the College Group's School structures and apart from some separate Learning Resources zones the College Group does not separate Further Education (FE) and HE students by any physical barriers on its campuses. HE students in College are able to progress from FE courses; this in turn provides inspiration to new FE learners and helps to raise awareness of progression opportunities to HE particularly for those from non-traditional backgrounds and whose parents did not attend university.

At the time of writing there are 848 students enrolled on HE courses, just over half (520) are on directly funded courses and the others (328) on franchised programmes. Kingston College has the largest number of HE students approximately 70% of those currently enrolled, just over 120 at South Thames College, and just over 100 at Carshalton College. Merton College at the time of writing this participation plan does not offer Higher Education (HE) courses.

The number of HE students studying at the Colleges has declined over the past three years as the HE environment has become ever more competitive. This significant decline in the numbers of HE students (227 less than in the APP for 2019/2020) has regrettably led to a reduction in the value of the financial support the College Group can commit to in this plan.

This Access and Participation Plan includes three dimensions of College Group activity;

- 1 The promotion, recruitment to, delivery of and support to students studying on the College Group's directly funded HE programmes;
- 2 The promotion, recruitment to, delivery of and support to students studying on programmes delivered in partnership with university partners under franchised arrangements, which are covered more directly by the partners' Access and Participation Plans;
- 3 And as a General Further Education College working with students aged 16-19 and those more mature studying level 1-3 programmes with an aspiration to progress to HE, either at the College Group or at University. South Thames Colleges Group is one of the largest FE College feeders to HE in the country with approaching a thousand students having progressed in 2019.

The TEF Subject Pilot data (2018-19) has been chosen as the best source of data to represent the College Group's HE student population and its characteristics, due to the unavailability of student data recorded in a consistent way from three colleges operating with different student data systems pre and early merger, and due to it excluding those franchised learners only studying for the minority of their study at the college group (eg Foundation Year students). As a comparison of the student profile over a period of time the TEF 3 year (2017/18) data is shown in parenthesis, although it should be understood these are not fully comparable with the 2018/19 data as this data does include a cohort of Foundation Year students who studied at the Group for only one year of their studies;

- 59% of students are female and 41% of students are male (2017/18 – 51% female, 49% male)
- 36% are aged under 21, a further 24% 21-25, and the remainder (40%) 26 years of age and above (2017/18 – 52% under 21, 28% aged 21-30, 20% 30 years+)
- 51% at point of enrolment identified their ethnicity as white, with 21% Black, 14% Asian, 14% Other and 1% unknown (2017/18 white 45%, Black 20%, Asian 22%, Other 12%, Unknown 2%)
- 10% of students have identified a disability (2017/18 9%)
- 43% enter with non-tariff entry qualifications, 32% with low tariff qualifications and 21% with medium or above tariff qualifications (2017/18 34% with non UCAS tariff, 46% with low UCAS tariff, 17% medium or above)
- 12 % enter from the lowest undergraduate participation areas (POLAR quintiles 1 and 2), with 46% from the highest undergraduate participation areas (POLAR quintile 5) (2017/18 – 16% from POLAR Quintiles 1 and 2, 35% from POLAR quintile 5)
- 53% of students are local (2017/18 – 35%)
- 44% of students are from areas of higher deprivation (IMD quintiles 1 and 2) and 34% of students are from areas of lower deprivation (IMD quintiles 4 and 5) (2017/18 – 46% from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 and 32% from IMD quintiles 4 and 5)

## History of Access Agreements

With this being only the sixth Access and Participation Plan (previously named Access Agreement) for any of the merged colleges, three of which were previously agreed only for Kingston and South Thames Colleges, and this therefore, only the third of the merged College Group, and in only the third year of the merged College's' existence it is difficult to draw strong conclusions about the impact of the past Plans/ Agreements.

## 1.1 Higher education participation, household income, or socioeconomic status

### Access

The OfS Access and Participation Dashboard identifies a gap in access to HE at South Thames Colleges Group between those from Polar quintile Group 1 and Group 5 of 43 percentage points in 2017/18 (8/51%), an increase on the previous year's 39 percentage point gap, although the percentage of quintile 1 students did increase in 2017/18 to 8% of the College Group's HE population. This is a significantly larger gap than at all English HE providers where in 2017/18 the gap was 18.3 percentage points and the percentage of students from quintile 1 was 12%. This gap is similar to that at North East Surrey College of Technology, a college located approximately 6 miles south of the college group border, where the gap was 42 percentage

points, but very different and compares poorly to a central London College, Havering College of Further and Higher Education, where students from quintile 1 actually outnumbered students from quintile 5 by 5 percentage points.

TEF Subject Pilot data (2018-19) indicates that only 12% of the College Group's student population are drawn from Polar Quintiles 1 and 2, and 46% from Polar Quintile 5, representing an Access gap of 34 percentage points which although smaller than above (this is a slightly different sample including franchise students studying for their entire course at the College Group) this still indicates a significant gap of disadvantage for students from lower HE participation neighbourhoods. The same source of TEF Subject Pilot data does indicate a different picture in terms socioeconomic status as 44% of the student population are drawn from the areas of higher deprivation (IMD quintiles 1 and 2), more by 10 percentage points than the 34% of students drawn from areas of lower deprivation (IMD quintiles 4 and 5).

The data above for full and part time students does indicate a significant gap of disadvantage for students from lower HE participation neighbourhoods (and socio-economic settings). The gap in access for part time students from IMD quintile 1 compared to 5 is particularly significant at (in 2017/18) 17.8 percentage points (8.6/26.4), and which was at similar levels for the previous two years (2015/16 14.6 and 2016/17 16.3). This percentage gap is significant in percentage terms, but the actual numbers being small accentuate the gap when expressed in these terms. This will be a focus of targeted activity in the future.

### Success

#### Non-continuation

Downloaded OfS Access and Participation data identifies that the gap in continuation rates for full time students between those from IMD quintiles 1 and quintile 5 at South Thames Colleges Group in 2016/17 was 24.6 percentage points and statistically significant. This gap was a significant rise from the previous year's positive position of 1.9 percentage points (and at that time not statistically significant). This will be a focus of targeted activity.

For part time students this gap (5 percentage points) is almost the same as for all English HE providers and is not statistically significant, and is more consistent with the wider sector pattern in previous years. The data here is somewhat contradictory and at this point in time will not be a focus of targeted activity, although this will be reviewed annually.

#### Attainment

Downloaded OfS Access and Participation Dashboard identifies a gap in attainment rates for full time students between those from IMD quintiles 1 and quintile 5 of 18.9 percentage points (42.9/61.8) in 2016/17 which is statistically significant, albeit a reduction from the previous year when the gap was 48.3 percentage points and also statistically significant. In **2014/15** the gap stood at 18.9 percentage points. Whilst small student populations heighten the percentage impact, this does indicate a continuing gap and will be a focus of targeted activity. Data is not available for part time students comparisons between IMD quintiles 1 and 5 because of small student populations. The later section in this report 3.4 explains plans to collect this data internally in the future although publication may still need to be restricted due to small populations and student confidentiality considerations.

#### Progression to employment or further study

The OfS Access and Participation Dashboard identifies a gap in progression rates for full time students between those from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 and quintiles 3/5 at South Thames Colleges Group in 2016/17 of 5 percentage points, and is not statistically significant, and earlier data, and for part time students, is not available. However, by reference to the downloadable OfS data resources a significant 22 percentage point gap (54.1/76.1) can be identified between students from IMD quintiles 1 and 5 in respect of progression and will be a focus of targeted activity.

TEF Subject Pilot data (2018-19) indicates progression of students from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2 to sustained employment or further study at 2.8 percentage points higher than that for those from quintiles 3/5 and just 0.8 percentage points below the relevant benchmark. 2017/18 TEF data shows a different situation and a gap of 10.1 percentage points between these two groups relating to progression to employment and further study.

TEF Subject Pilot data (2018-19) indicates that progression of students to sustained employment or further study is 6.1 percentage points lower for students from IMD quintiles 1 and 2 than for those for quintiles 3/5

although only 0.2 percentage point different from the relevant benchmark. This will not be a focus of targeted activity.

The analysis above includes analysis using data from TEF and the OfS Access and Participation Dashboard). Comparisons between quintile 1 and 5 are not available from the College Group's own data (nor OfS downloadable resources). The later section 3.4 explains plans to provide such potential in the future.

## 1.2 Black, Asian and minority ethnic students

### Access

The OfS Access and Participation Dashboard recognises that in 2017/18 the % of students recognised as white at all English HE providers was 68.9%, at South Thames Colleges Group it was 52% (that an increased figure from the previous three years) and represents a more diverse student population of 48% non-white than the sector. Black students represented 18% of the population against an all English HE providers of 10.5%, Asian students represented 8% of the College Group's population against an all English HE providers of 13.7%, a total of 15% students identified themselves as "other" compared to an all English HE providers 1.9%, and a mixed College Group population of 8% against an all English HE providers 4.8% of population. At North East Surrey College of Technology, in 2017/18, the non-white student population stood at 53% and at Havering College of Further and Higher Education, just 33%.

TEF Subject Pilot data (2018-19) which includes some slightly more up to date data recognises a non-white student population of 48% and is consistent with the above and demonstrates a College with a diverse student population. This will not be a target of activity for the College Group.

### Success

#### Non-continuation

The OfS Access and Participation Dashboard identifies the gap in continuation rates for full time students between those who are recognised as white and all others at South Thames Colleges Group in 2016/17 was 14 percentage points and not statistically significant, at all English HE providers it was 3.2 percentage points and statistically relevant. This gap was a significant rise from a positive position of 6 percentage points, but still not statistically significant and accordingly will not be a focus of specific activity. An investigation of disaggregated BAME data for 2016/17 does indicate some gaps (part time and full time) for sub groups, and a statistically significant gap of 22.2 percentage points (53.3/75.5) in continuation rates for full time Black students compared with white students. There is a gap between black and white part time students, but smaller (not statistically significant gap), of 12.4 percentage points (71.4/83.8). This specific full time gap will be a focus of targeted activity.

For part time students this gap for the whole group (10 percentage points) is lower than for all English HE providers (6.5pp) and is not statistically significantly, and accordingly this group wide gap will not be a focus of specific activity.

An examination of disaggregated OfS downloadable non continuation data for other BAME groups shows no statistically significant gaps for mixed and other ethnic groupings but for the Asian group in 2016/17 a gap of 18.9 percentage points (56.7/75.5) compared to white students with a similar gap appearing in the previous 2 years (all of which are statistically significant). This will be an area of targeted activity.

### Attainment

The gap in attainment rates for full time students between those who are recognised as white and all others at South Thames Colleges Group in 2016/17 was 12 percentage points (and consistent with previous years) and not statistically significant, (and accordingly whole group wide will not be a focus of specific activity), at all English HE providers it was higher at 13.2 percentage points and statistically relevant. There is no data available for part time students. (OfS Access and Participation Dashboard). There is a specific gap in attainment between one subgroup – black – and white students (full time) of 15.6 percentage points (41.2/56.8) and in line with the commitment above, in respect of continuation, will be a focus of targeted activity

An examination of disaggregated OfS downloadable attainment data for other BAME groups shows no statistically significant gaps for Asian, mixed and other ethnic groupings and for the mixed group in 2016/17,

for the first time, a gap of 21.1 percentage points (35.7/56.8) compared to white students but this is the first occasion of such a gap appearing and is not statistically significant.

### Progression to employment or further study

The gap in progression rates for full time students between those who are recognised as white and all others at South Thames Colleges Group in 2016/17 was 9 percentage points, consistent with the previous year and not statistically significant, and accordingly will not be a focus of specific activity, at all English HE providers it was lower at 3.9 percentage points and statistically relevant (OfS Access and Participation Dashboard).

For part time students there is a positive gap (+5 percentage points) is however statistically not significant, and will not be a focus of specific activity.

TEF Subject Pilot data (2018-19) indicates that the progression rate for BME to employment or further study is 9.6 percentage points worse for students from BME Backgrounds than for those recognised as white. This, non-continuation and attainment will not be a target of activity for the Group. 2017/18 TEF data shows a smaller gap of 2.8 percentage points, a situation which is close (just 0.9 percentage point) away from benchmark.

The analysis above includes analysis using data from TEF and the OfS Access and Participation Dashboard.

An examination of disaggregated OfS downloadable progression data for other BAME groups shows no statistically significant gaps for Black, mixed and other ethnic groupings and for Asian group in 2016/17, for the first time, a statistically significant gap of 21.5 percentage points (44.4/65.9) compared to white students but this is the first occasion of such a gap appearing, and will be monitored in future years.

## 1.3 Mature students

### Access

Data from the OfS Access and Participation Dashboard identifies that at South Thames Colleges Group, in 2017/18, the proportion of full time mature students (aged 21+), at 80%, is four times higher than younger students (20%). This also is much larger than the proportion of full time mature students studying at all English HE providers, which at 27.8% is just a little over one third of the College Group proportion.

The situation is reversed with part time students, with the number of part time mature students at 45%, for the same year, being actually lower than the comparable number of part young students at the College Group (55%) and almost half of the proportion of part time mature students studying at all English HE providers, which stood at 87.4%.

TEF Subject Pilot data (2018-19) recognises that 64% of the student population is mature (21+) and this slightly lower figure than above is influenced by recruitment to some franchised courses where younger students complete the entirety of their study at the College Group. With this significant mature student population studying in the College Group this will not be a target of activity.

### Success

### Non-continuation

The OfS Access and Participation Dashboard identifies that Non continuation rates for full time mature students worsened significantly in 2016/17 by 15 percentage points to 34%, and compared poorly with all English HE providers which stood at 15.2% (a gap of 19 percentage points). For part time students a more consistent pattern is visible, the 2016/17 non continuation rate of 22% being 16.2 percentage points better than all English HE providers. This will be a focus of targeted activity.

TEF Subject Pilot data (2018-19) indicates that the non-continuation rate for mature learners is 5.1 percentage points worse for mature compared to young students, and 2.7 percentage points below the relevant benchmark. This will be subject to targeted activity. (2017/18 TEF data shows a 4.5 percentage point gap between mature and younger students in continuation rates and a performance 5 percentage points below benchmark).

## Attainment

Attainment rates for full time mature students at 50.5% in 2016/17 were disappointing and had dropped significantly by 11.2 percentage points since 2014/15 and compared poorly with all English HE providers which stood at 70% (a gap of 20 percentage points). The gap between the attainment of young and mature full time students at the College Group was 6.7 percentage (50.5/57.1) points and actually a reduction in that gap which stood in the previous year at 34.3 percentage points (49/83.3). Data is not available for part time students (OfS Access and Participation Dashboard, nor downloaded OfS data). Whilst this attainment gap in full time students has narrowed considerably and will not be a target of activity immediately this will be reviewed annually.

## Progression to employment or further study

Progression rates to employment or further study for full time mature students increased significantly in 2016/17 to 66% and but was still 9.7 percentage points below all English HE providers. For part time students in 2016/17, a significant drop in progression to 40% (down by 25 percentage points) was almost half the 75.8% progression rate at all English HE providers.

TEF Subject Pilot data (2018-19) shows a better and different position with mature students progressing to sustained employment or further study at a rate 5.8 percentage points higher than young students (and 2.8 percentage points above the relevant benchmark), and progressing to highly skilled employment at a rate 4.2 percentage points higher than young students (but 7.2 percentage points below the relevant benchmark). This different set of data may be explained by the inclusion within this data of students studying on franchised Foundation Degrees in Early Years, and associated subjects, who are already studying alongside employment.

Whilst this situation is currently unclear there are sufficient concerning signs and this will be reviewed annually.

## 1.4 Disabled students

### Access

The OfS Access and Participation Dashboard data recognises that in 2017/18 the percentage of students recognised with a disability at South Thames Colleges Group was, for full time students, 12% (an increase of 7 percentage points on the previous year), and 2.6 percentage points below the percentage population at all English HE providers. For part time students the gap between the College Group and the wider sector was larger at 5.8 percentage points with the College Group's disabled students representing 9% of the population compared to 14.8% at all English HE providers. TEF Subject Pilot data (2018-19) shows a slightly smaller percentage of population, 10%, and will be an area of targeted activity.

### Success

#### Non-continuation

The small number of disabled learners at the South Thames Colleges Group makes judgements difficult although the data below indicates no gap and actually a better overall performance by disabled students than those without. By reference to the OfS Access and Participation Dashboard in 2016/17 identifies a performance of disabled students ten percentage points better than that of students without a disability. TEF Subject Pilot data (2018-19) shows a similar non continuation situation between students with and without disability, with a tiny 0.9 percentage point better continuation rate for students with disability. 2017/18 TEF data showed a gap of just 0.2 of a percentage point. However, there is a gap identifiable in continuation rates for part time disabled students (although not statistically significant) of 6.9 percentage points (75/81.9) and will be an area of targeted activity.

## Attainment and Progression to employment or further study

The numbers of students with disabilities are low. The College will need to be mindful and sensitive of its ability to publish such data. There is a limited amount of historical comparative data for this aspect of this group's performance (the later section 3.4 explains plans to provide such data in the future). What is available indicates no gap in attainment between students with disabilities and those without a disability, but

with respect to progression a significant gap for disabled students compared with those without disability of 23.3 percentage points (40/63.3).

TEF Subject Pilot data (2018-19) shows a 7.2 percentage point gap between those students who do not have a disability, and those that do, in respect of progression to highly skilled employment (and a below benchmark performance of 12.9 percentage points) but a more equal progression rate to sustained employment and further study with a gap of just 0.5 of a percentage point (and a progression rate 5.5 percentage points above the relevant benchmark). 2017/18 TEF data shows that for progression to sustained employment with a disability there is actually a better performance than by students without a disability by 2.4 percentage points, but progression to highly skilled employment a gap of 4.2 percentage points and a 9.3 below benchmark performance.

The College recognises that student feedback is identifying some lack of confidence in the consistency of support for students with disability across the colleges in the Group, and this and the above data, means that access, non-continuation, and progression for students with disabilities will all be focuses of targeted activity.

## 1.5 Care leavers

Access, Success, Non-continuation. Attainment and Progression to employment or further study

There is an absence of historical and current data for this underrepresented group at the College Group and this will be addressed in the future strategic actions and evaluation section.

TEF metrics do not provide specific data about care leavers and the Colleges' data about access, success and progression of care leavers is currently incomplete for HE learners. As an FE college we monitor close the performance of our younger students in care, and those that have left care and those mechanisms will be extended to the monitoring of those studying at HE level.

Research on Care Leavers experience of HE includes;

- data from the Department for Education showing that only around 6 per cent of all care leavers between the ages of 19-21 were in higher education in 2018,
- research published by the National Network for the Education of Care Leavers suggesting that 12 per cent of care leavers had entered higher education by the age of 23.
- And demonstrates a significant gap of 42% of other young people entering higher education.

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/promoting-equal-opportunities/evaluation-and-effective-practice/care-leavers-and-looked-after-children/>

The same OfS research indicates that a high proportion of care leavers do not complete their course and "almost half will leave before the end of their course". Care leavers remain 38 percent more likely to withdraw from their studies compared to the general population of young people.

[file:///N:/Downloads/2020Positive-Impact-Report%20\(1\).pdf](file:///N:/Downloads/2020Positive-Impact-Report%20(1).pdf)

Compared to other graduates, care experienced students are notably more likely to be:

- Women
- Older
- Disabled
- From minority ethnic communities and holding a nationality other than British.
- Have lower status entry qualifications and are more likely to be graduating from a sub-degree programme and be studying at an institution that is not within the Russell Group

In terms of attainment somewhat fewer care experienced graduates receiving a first or upper second class degree than other graduates.

The analysis of data from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey on outcomes six months after graduation, revealed that Care Leavers were:

- Around 1.25 times more likely to be unemployed (5.5%, compared to 4.4% for other graduates) and, among those in full-time work, 70.7% were in professional roles compared to 77.0% for other graduates
- Salary levels were very similar

[file:///N:/Downloads/2020Positive-Impact-Report%20\(1\).pdf](file:///N:/Downloads/2020Positive-Impact-Report%20(1).pdf)



The College Group in academic year 2019/2020 has 100 16-17-year-old looked after children, and 75 care leavers, studying FE programmes and in this context alone it is considered that the College Group should make initially Access an activity target.

## 1.6 Intersections of disadvantage

The identification and analysis of intersections of disadvantage at South Thames College Group is difficult due to the very low numbers making the publicly available data less available due to their being suppressed for data protection reasons in some instances. As a relatively newly merged college, with the past colleges using different management and information systems (as explained elsewhere) and a relatively recent adoption of one system the use of reliable and helpful internal data is also limited.

There is a significant focus in this Access and Participation Plan on disabled students, at all points in their life cycle, and this would appear a sensible starting point for such analysis using our internal data which whilst may still prove difficult for publication purposes will be analysable, and helpful within the college. This will be possible from the first review point during academic year 2020/2021.

## 1.7 Other groups who experience barriers in higher education

As a General Further Education College there is a significant cohort of young learners who are drawn from more economically deprived situations and are in receipt of Bursary Support Funds, including a free college meal entitlement, due to their household income being less than £26,000 per annum. Our targeted activity identified from data in section 1.1 about access to HE for students from backgrounds of lower household income and more deprived socio-economic situations will encompass this group.

Strategic aims and objectives

## 2.1 South Thames Colleges Group's Strategy 2019-2021 – Talented Together

### **Mission**

To ensure all our students and partners succeed and progress, making their prospects better.

### **Vision**

South Thames Colleges Group will be an exceptional Further and Higher Education provider, leading our sector in London and beyond.

We will do this by excelling at what we do every day: delivering great outcomes for young people and adults of all backgrounds and abilities to make sure their life chances are improved. This will require exemplary teaching, learning and support, close partnership across the region and very well-managed resources with sustainable finances.

We will base our work around our commitment to public service and all the values that come with it.

We will make sure that people from all walks of life and all ability levels are welcome here and can thrive. We expect them all to commit to their learning, to achieve and then progress to the future of their choice. We will provide great resources, teaching and support to help them to do so. We will act as an effective partner, working with our stakeholders across South London to help them flourish, developing their work and expanding their businesses with us alongside them. We will engage with opportunities to grow, nationally, regionally and in our local neighbourhoods and we will commit to high standards of employment practice, working closely with our colleagues to improve and develop the organisation, promoting wellbeing while we strengthen the Group's performance.

**Six key targets** - We will measure this success of this strategy over its three-year life-span. By end of 2021, we will have achieved:

1. Consistently good or better outcomes across the Group
2. A proactive approach to wellbeing for staff and students
3. Effective and comprehensive support for students' development and progression

4. Active engagement with partners, innovations and opportunities
5. A review of our curriculum, with paths to growth and innovation identified
6. Good or better financial health combined with substantial investment in our buildings

## Value for Money and Approach to Teaching, Learning and Assessment

South Thames Colleges Group is committed to providing good value for money higher education to students for whom many maintenance costs and fees are a psychological, and for some, a real barrier. The Group commits to only charge above the basic tuition fee where provision is validated by a university partner and there is a significant per head validation charge. Where the programme is awarded by an awarding body with more modest fees per head of student the Group will charge a tuition fee below the basic level.

The characteristics of HE programme delivery at South Thames Colleges Group are;

- Small group delivery
- Learning hours per week and/ or number of learning weeks larger than in other HE settings
- High level of accessibility to lecturers
- Personal tutorial support
- High levels of academic and study support

The TEF Year 3 Statement of Findings below, identified the following characteristics and particular evidence of learning and study at South Thames Colleges Group;

- “a curriculum that is focused on the development of student employment and enterprise skills,
- student engagement with their studies with generous small group class contact time;
- an institutional culture that recognises and rewards excellence in teaching through peer observation, appraisal and scrutiny of external examiner reports. This includes provision of a mentoring scheme to support new academics;
- an approach to staff development designed to enhance student learning opportunities which includes CPD days to support HEA fellowship submissions”.

This Plan and the College Group’s practice is aligned with the Group’s published Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy and the Employability and Employer Involvement Policy. South Thames Colleges Group is a General Further Education College, recently graded “Good” by Ofsted (February 2020). Many of the characteristics outlined in the above TEF statement of findings were identified also by Ofsted, for example these in connection with student employment and enterprise skills:” “Leaders are highly effective in engaging employers in curriculum development. They work closely with local authorities and local businesses to plan for future skills needs.” It further praises the College Group on how well it prepares its students for progression to their next step stating that: “Teachers ensure that students and apprentices know how to conduct themselves in professional contexts and are well prepared for future employment. Students and apprentices gain valuable insights into the demands and rewards of work through site visits and work experience.” The College Group’s Higher Education student population is an important one, but a minority population in terms of student numbers. Most teaching staff will work on both FE and HE and the College Group’s Continuing Professional Development and more recently introduced (Spring 2020) Scholarship Policy will support learning throughout the College. The teaching community’s knowledge and awareness of learners’ experience at L3, both younger and mature learners, means that the College’s teaching staff are well placed to manage and support transition to L4 study and impact positively on success and progression.

## 2.2 Target groups

The assessment of performance section recognises that in broad terms the College Group’s Access and Participation activity outlined by this plan, and based on evidence of gaps must be more accurately targeted (than in the past), take the form of bespoke activity and avoid what has been a symptom of the past of being absorbed within broader helpful widening participation activity, but which has not been as effective in impacting upon specific target groups as it should have. As an example of this the target in the 2019/20 Plan to “Ensure across the new and extended college the application of consistent and accessible academic and other support services for HE learners to limit non continuation rates to a maximum of 12% and increase the percentage of students “completing their study in their intended year” to a minimum of 88%” has been withdrawn and replaced by the more specific and targeted activity supported by gap analysis evidence.

Based on the assessment of performance the Access and Participation Plan activity will focus on;

Disabled students

- access, non-continuation, and progression

Higher education participation, household income, or socioeconomic status

- access, non-continuation, and attainment

Black, Asian and minority ethnic students

- non-continuation and attainment for the disaggregated group - Black students
- non-continuation – Asian students

Mature students

- non-continuation

Care Leavers

- access

## 2.2 Aims and objectives – full details appear on Target sheet of Target Investment Plan and Target Ref No. annotated plans and actions later in this plan

South Thames College Group's Aims and Objectives for its Access and Participation Plan, is consistent with its broader published Diversity and Inclusion Policy (see section below entitled "Alignment with other strategies - South Thames Colleges Group's commitment to Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Widening Participation") and specifically outlines its objectives in connection with its Higher Education student population, enquirers and applicants including commitments "to actively promote access to learning programmes", "provide services which are effective in recognising and assessing the specific needs of individuals and in ensuring that the right kinds of support and interventions are provided to meet these needs" and in the table below outlines the specific plans resulting from the "Assessment of Performance" outlined above including the undertaking of rigorous monitoring of learner achievement and take action aimed at addressing any equality gaps and will facilitate the implementation change as necessary to achieve the strategy objective of developing a systematic approach to assess the impact of new and existing policies, procedures and processes to ensure that where there is the potential for negative impacts that they are identified and addressed. The Plan covers a time period of five years (2020-21/2024-25) with annual monitoring points. The details of specific objectives are outlined in the table below and full details appear on Targets and Investment Plan referred to in the appendix and provided as a separate excel spreadsheet.

Target group –and lifecycle (Target Ref no.)	Description of aim and objective	Objective
Disabled students – access - PTA – 1	Increase comparative % of disabled students of FT student population	To close STCG gap with all UK HE Providers
For the disaggregated group - black students– non continuation – PTS- 2	Reduce percentage difference (gap) in non-continuation rates between black and white students	To close STCG gap in non-continuation rates between black and white students
For the disaggregated group - black students– attainment – PTS- 3	Reduce percentage difference (gap) in attainment rates between black and white students	To close STCG gap in non-continuation rates between black and white students
For the disaggregated group – Asian students– attainment – PTS- 6	Reduce percentage difference (gap) in non-continuation rates between Asian and white students	To close STCG gap in non-continuation rates between Asian and white students
Disabled students – progression PTP-1	Reduce 23 percentage point difference in (gap) in progression for disabled learners	To reduce progression gap at STCG between disabled learners and learners

		without disability at STCG by 2024/5 to 4% and be eradicated entirely in 2025/6
Higher education participation, household income, or socioeconomic status – access – PTA -2	Reduce comparative % gap of FT student population between students from IMD quintiles 1 and 5	To close STCG access gap between IMD quintiles 1 and 5
Mature students – non continuation PTS -1	Reduce percentage difference in (gap) in non-continuation for mature learners	To close STCG gap in non-continuation rates between mature learners and others
Care Leavers – Access PTA-3	All Care leavers and those in Care (FE) from STCG to have collaborative university partner experience (in addition to intensive 1-2-1 progression support)	To support a higher proportion of Care Leavers from STCG into HE than the national average (6% - 2018)
Higher education participation, household income, or socioeconomic status – success – PTS -4	Reduce comparative % non-continuation gap of FT student population between students from IMD quintiles 1 and 5	To close STCG non continuation gap between IMD quintiles 1 and 5
Higher education participation, household income, or socioeconomic status – success – PTS -5	Reduce comparative % attainment gap of FT student population between students from IMD quintiles 1 and 5	To close STCG attainment gap between IMD quintiles 1 and 5

## 2. Strategic measures

The development and implementation of HE Strategy for the College and its approach to widening participation including the development, implementation and management of this Access and Participation Plan pass through a series of College Group deliberative committees, and broader knowledge and awareness activity is undertaken at other College Meetings (these meetings and functions have been in place for two years and continue).

As a fundamental function of the Group's Theory of Change (outlined below) the College Group recognises that in broad terms Access and Participation activity outlined by this plan, and based on evidence and analysis of gaps must be more accurately targeted (than in the past), take the form of bespoke activity and be more directly monitored against the specific targets outlined above. As part of the Theory of Change model all the functions below will, from Spring 2020, engage with details of the Plan, targets, aims and objectives.

The College Group's Quality, Learning and Standards Committee is the principal Governor forum for the detailed analysis, evaluation and questioning of Access and Participation activity, and outcomes, and reports its findings and recommendations to the Corporation.

The College Group's Higher Education Matrix Meeting which meets monthly is responsible for the strategic direction of HE and access and participation activity and evaluation of impact (for report to Governors via the College's Group Leadership Team (GLT)). Over the five year span of the Plan it will be the role of the this Matrix Group to respond to the detailed analysis of progress on access, success and progression produced by the meeting group described below, (HEAB), and implement corrective and/or sustaining actions (as appropriate) across the College Group via the various operational meetings mentioned below. The monitoring of the outcomes of the Access and Participation Plan is a component part of the HE Annual Operating Plan. This is monitored, reported upon [to GLT and to the Governor's Learning and Standards Committee] by the HE Matrix Meeting.

The Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB) is a termly meeting which amongst other academic standard, learner experience and outcome analysis is responsible for the detailed analysis of access and participation impact and provides the HE Matrix Meeting with the detailed analysis to make strategic recommendations.

The Higher Education Operations Group (HEOG) is the termly held meeting that ensures that access and participation activity, admissions processes and promotion is taking place as planned and is being monitored via the College's Management Information and other systems.

The College's within the group hold weekly College Management Meetings via which knowledge, and awareness of access and participation activity is raised and "in college" activity implemented.

The theory of change model will ensure that in addition to the continuance of the culture of small class, significant one to one support and tutorial provision, focussing on the individual learner and their needs, outlined in the earlier section entitled “Value for Money and Approach to Teaching Learning and Assessment”, the processes mentioned above will be informed and guided by data included in Programme Quality Monitoring Reports and in the Group Monitoring Reports (described elsewhere) about continuation, attainment and progression for different groups of learners. At programme level where these Programme Quality Monitoring Reports are discussed and compiled the attention to outcomes for different groups will be closely analysed and inform course planning and delivery and students support.

### 3.1 Whole provider strategic approach

#### Overview

The Colleges in South Thames Colleges Group, whilst quite young in their history and experience of Access and Participation Plans (and previously Access Agreements) have played for many years a very broad role in widening participation into education, and into higher education, both as a Further Education College supporting students from L3 to higher study inside and externally to the College and as a Higher Education Provider in its own right.

This Access and Participation Plan recognises the need for a more targeted approach for activity in this plan, and its separation from the College’s other work in helping its broad L3 population to progress, and outlines a theory and process for change. The Theory of Change (flowing from left to right in the table below) has the characteristics of a “logic” model (and as informed by the paper referenced below the table) with “activities and enablers” identified within the change requirement and change action columns. Change actions and requirement are detailed, and within many a change process such as evaluate, generate an, share and learn are included. This process of change has started from January 2020 and has been given added impetus by the appointment of a new cross college role – Head of Higher Education – a new and additional resource providing the opportunity to influence leadership, curriculum and support functions across the group. The timescale for implementation is;

- Identification and articulation of change requirement – Spring Term 2020
- Change action implementation – Summer and Autumn Term 2020 and Spring Term and Summer 2021
- Output evidence becoming visible – from Autumn 2021 onwards– full output evidence expected during academic year 2021/2022 (these later dates have been influenced by Covid-19 interruptions). By Autumn 2021 outputs numbered 1, 3, 4 should be fully visible and evidenced, the full implementation evidence based activity at group and curriculum level (outputs 2 and 5) whilst developing by that date will evolve further in the remaining years of this change process as more evidence becomes available from the success of the strategic and system based outputs 1,3,4.

Starting point/current situation →	Change requirement →	Change action →	Output
Limited recognition of APP activity and objectives as a specific process (rather a component of FEC activity)	Access and Participation Activity (outlined within this plan) to be recognised and understood as directly targeted, discrete and bespoke – separate, albeit complementary, to other broader HE progression activity undertaken by the College (as an FEC) and to be recognised within the HE Strategy – Commit and prioritise	Clear articulation and engagement with details of the Plan, targets, aims and objectives at Governor Quality Learning and Standards Committee (and to Corporation), HE Matrix (and to GLT), Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB) and Higher Education Operations Group (HEOG)	(1) Recognition of APP activity as a strategic and specific activity part of College activity but recognised and evaluated in its own right
Based too much on opinion and incomplete data	Access and Participation Activity design and implementation – Use evidence to inform and design	Targeted , focussed, discrete - Higher Education Operations Group (HEOG)	(2) Evidence based activity and implementation
Limited specific evaluation with incomplete data	Access and Participation Activity granular evaluation	Quantitative and Qualitative evaluation of impact of specific activity and a the development of a range of MiS tools to supplement TEF and OfS Dashboard data	(3) Monitoring and evaluation aligned directly to milestones and targets
Broad analysis and evaluation which is insufficient to support future developments	Whole Provider Access and Participation evaluation of progress utilising granular evaluation above – Evaluate, generate, share and learn	Evaluation at Governor Quality Learning and Standards Committee (and to Corporation), HE Matrix (and to GLT), Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB)	(4) Strategic level appreciation of impacts of all relevant APP activity

Teaching , learning and assessment and curriculum planning on some programmes are less effective in recognising relevant HE contexts	Reinforcement at programme level of the already developed PDP and differentiated approach to planning and delivery of teaching , learning and assessment (in the HE and Access and Participation context) - Evaluate, generate, share and learn	College Management Meetings, HE focussed CPD and working with partner universities	(5) College and Programme level recognition and practice development to support targeted activity at all HE life stages
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“Creating your Theory of Change” NPC’s Practice Guide November 2014

### Alignment with other strategies - South Thames Colleges Group’s commitment to Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Widening Participation

The College Group’s published Diversity and Inclusion Policy (this and the Access and Participation Plan pays due regard to the Equalities Act in their development) appears in the table below, and as this Access and Participation Plan is read the implementation of this strategy and it’s translation into operation will become evident. For example, the commitments in the strategy below;

- to “actively promote access to learning programmes” is outlined in the College’s Outreach access and success activities below,
- “provide services which are effective in recognising and assessing the specific needs of individuals and in ensuring that the right kinds of support and interventions are provided to meet these needs” are outlined below in the section entitled “Retention and Success Activities and HE experience” and our support for learners with disabilities is outlined on a later page.
- The opening section of this plan entitled “Assessment of Performance” outlines in detail how in this context the College Group will “undertake rigorous monitoring of learner achievement and take action aimed at addressing any equality gaps” and this will enable us to implement change a necessary and achieve the strategy’s objective of developing “ a systematic approach to assess the impact of new and existing policies, procedures and processes to ensure that where there is the potential for negative impacts that they are identified and addressed”.

<p><b>DIVERSITY &amp; INCLUSION POLICY</b></p> <p>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion are central to the work of the South Thames Colleges Group. We will treat all people with dignity and respect and we will promote equality of opportunity, inclusive practice and diversity. Within each College, we treat each other fairly, with respect and dignity regardless of:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Age, Disability, Gender, Gender Reassignment, Race, Religion/Belief, Pregnancy/ Maternity, Marriage /Civil partnership and Sexual Orientation</p> <p>We strive to create an environment where everyone is supported in realising their goals and aspirations. Therefore, we promote equality and inclusion, celebrate diversity and will not tolerate discrimination, which is not only wrong but also hurtful and can be illegal.</p> <p>How is this achieved?</p> <p>Our underlying commitment is to eliminate discrimination and promote equality and inclusivity across all protected characteristics which translates to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion being embedded in all policies, practices, decision making and evaluative processes.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> We actively promote access to learning programmes and services for all our learners and potential clients to enable them to improve their skills, to make progress and be successful in realising their ambitions.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> We create a visibly diverse and inclusive environment, which values and celebrates difference and raises the aspiration of existing and potential learners.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> We are striving towards developing a staff profile, management team and governing body which are commensurate with the above.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> We provide services which are effective in recognising and assessing the specific needs of individuals and in ensuring that the right kinds of support and interventions are provided to meet these needs.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> We will, wherever possible, procure services from organisations who demonstrate a commitment to Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> We tackle discrimination, whether direct or indirect.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> We promote an ethos within The South Thames Colleges Group whereby all learners and members of staff respect the views, values, culture and beliefs of others.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> We undertake rigorous monitoring of learner achievement and take action aimed at addressing any equality gaps as per those listed by Ofsted.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> We maintain a systematic approach to assess the impact of new and existing policies, procedures and processes to ensure that where there is the potential for negative impacts that they are identified and addressed.</p> <p>The South Thames Colleges Group will implement change to achieve this Policy through action plans defined within a Single Equality Scheme. The Single Equality Scheme will integrate all actions that The Group will take to address each of the protected characteristics.</p>
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## Supporting, understanding and implementing widening participation strategy

The College Group's Undergraduate Admissions Policy has been written with the principles of fair and equal access and widening participation at its heart and contains the following specific paragraphs;

### Paragraph 2. Fair Admissions

South Thames Colleges Group seeks to ensure a fair Undergraduate Admissions process which provides equal opportunity for all applicants, regardless of background, to gain admission to a course suited to their ability and aspirations. Our approach to the admission of students also upholds the principles of fair admission outlined in the Schwartz Report (2004), through being transparent, fair, honest, consistent, accessible, personalised and timely.

The policy has been drawn up following examination of best practice guidance from the Office for Students (OfS), Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) and the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) and aims to provide an efficient, fair and transparent HE Admissions function to all stakeholders in line with our Group Mission.

### Paragraph 21.7 Equality

All colleges within South Thames Colleges Group remain committed to promoting equality, diversity and fairness irrespective of age, disability, gender, pregnancy or marital status, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation or transgender status.

## Strategic measures

### Partnership working

#### University Partners

As mentioned in the first section of this plan, the College Group maintains partnerships with a number of universities which is part of the College Group's strategic approach to the provision of higher study opportunities to learners from widening participation groups and students from non-traditional routes. As a General Further Education College, without awarding body powers, (having considered but at this stage decided not to pursue its own degree awarding status), these partnerships provide opportunities to learners to achieve, or Top Up L4 and 5 learning, to Full Honours Degrees either at the College Group, or with partners in locations, and settings well suited to learners progressing through an HE in FE environment.

In addition, the College Group promotes, recruits to, delivers and supports students studying on programmes delivered in partnership with university partners under franchised arrangements (which are, of course, covered more directly by the partners' Access and Participation Plans) and specifically offer opportunities to learners with more modest prior achievement, studying at a later stage in their lives and/or wishing to study near home where work and life commitments may restrict travel to learn distances. Examples of these are;

- Foundation Year Business – this one year pre-degree study offers those learners with prior achievement that will not provide them with direct entry to the Honours Degree the opportunity to study at the College Group, uplift their knowledge and understanding of business subjects, their study and other skills, and their confidence and progress to the university itself for the remainder of their study. This course which has over 100 students currently enrolled is part of a long tradition of the colleges within the Group working with its major local university partner in offering such opportunities to students who are often from a widening participation background and whom may live further afield. For over 20 years the college offered a similar opportunity in the subjects of Science, Computing and Maths to cohorts of in excess of 300 per year before the very recent relocation of this provision back to the university itself.
- Foundation Degree Early Years – offered at two of the Colleges in the Group this course provides the opportunity to mature learners, working in the early years childcare field, to study for (alongside work and in the evening) and achieve a Foundation Degree, and then Top Up at the university itself. The majority of these learners are from a widening participation background and benefit significantly from the small group teaching, accessibility to tutors and high levels of support in the first two years of entry to HE, which for many, from feedback, is a daunting prospect and following a long gap since previous formal education.
- PGCE – this two year programme, and the Top Up degree in Teaching provides mature learners the opportunity to become fully qualified teachers, whilst studying alongside work and teaching practice. This part time evening study provides an opportunity which many could otherwise not take.

#### AimHigher London South (AHLs)

The College Group remains an active member of Aim Higher London South (<http://aimhigherlondonsouth.org.uk/>) 'National Collaborative Outreach Programme' (NCOP). Through a range of activities AimHigher look to ensure fair access and progression onto Higher Education support for young people from non-traditional backgrounds. This is achieved by linking schools, colleges, universities and education providers together to work effectively. AHLs works in partnership with 10 HE institutions/universities, 29 schools, 5 further education colleges, 9 Local Authorities and 11 other Associate Partners across London and the South East.

The College Group is involved in not only promoting its key widening participation opportunities within the College but also contributes content and the actual delivery of these activities at other colleges and schools.

The College Group also contributes to Aim Higher leadership and organisation with for a number of years the Group's Director of Student Services sitting on the organisation's strategic committee, and the Group's Head of Marketing and Admissions on its operations committee.

Specific work with AimHigher South and a number of our local university partners has commenced in Spring Term 2020 and will be specifically targeted at Care Leavers and supporting them to recognise and take the opportunity of progression to HE, either at the College Group or more broadly at other external HE providers and will include arranged visits, tours, presentations and interviews at local university partners.

## **Linking London**

South Thames Colleges Group is a very active member of Linking London, a partnership of educational organisations that work collaboratively to maximise contributions to targeted widening participation, student engagement and success, social mobility and in pursuit of improvements in social justice through education. The core aims of the Linking London partnership are to support recruitment, retention and progression to and through higher education. The College Group is particularly active in the partnerships HE in FE forums, which are chaired by the College Group's Assistant Principal for Higher Education, the Higher and Degree Apprenticeship and Access to HE Groups.

## **Strategies to increase access (and success) from 2020-2021**

### **Financial Support**

The increasingly competitive HE market has negatively impacted the number of students being recruited to the Group and planned for the next five years. There is a significant decline from previous years' Access and Participation Plans in the planned student numbers on courses with tuition fees above the basic tuition fee limit. Accordingly, there is a reduction in the value of funds available to provide financial support compared with previous years and previous plans, and this has led to reduction in the total value of financial support and contributed to the changes outlined below.

The College Group has in the past offered five types of bursaries, but will reduce its range to three, focus upon its recognised target groups, and provide financial support to learners in others years of their study, rather than just in their first year (as a result of student feedback, which was an informal application of the survey aspect of the OfS financial support evaluation toolkit (the statistical tool was not used), and also a lack of demand for some eg. Mature learners in past years). Multiple bursaries will not be available to an individual student over the life of their study but unlike past Plans they will be available in all years and level of study, not just the first year as previously. They will also each be of a lower value due to the reduced number of students paying above basic tuition fees but our wish to maintain the number of opportunities available to individual students. These bursaries whilst "ostensibly" acting as an access tool to attract a range of learners including those from areas/backgrounds of, low income and / or low socio economic status, and care leavers are also intended as success tools to support individual learners whilst in learning to be successful despite difficult personal financial circumstances (the feedback from HE Student Forums continues to indicate that for learners from lower income and low socio economic status the anxiety of loan based funding remains high). These bursaries described as "ostensibly" acting as access tools provide an indicator to applicants of other financial help and act as a trigger to engage in discussion about the workings of student finance. They also act as a success tool to support learners with everyday finance such as travel expense to support their learning. Similarly, the HE Hardship Fund acts as a success tool supporting learners from the above groups at all of the Colleges who face immediate and urgent financial crisis to maintain their focus on study in spite of those difficulties.

### **Internal College Progression and School Leavers [from non-selective state Schools with the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, the London Boroughs of Croydon, Lambeth, Richmond upon Thames, Wandsworth, Sutton and Merton, and Elmbridge Borough Council] Bursaries – for students with lower household incomes and who live in the areas of highest deprivation(Target PTA2)**

The College will continue to offer "progression bursaries" to students progressing from within the College or a non-selective state school (as above) from a level 3/Access course to a full time Higher Education programme. The bursary of £500 will be paid (the whole amount payable in the year of study of the application), either as a partial fee discount, or as a cash. The eligibility for this bursary will be that the applicant;

- Has progressed from a L3 course at one of the colleges within the South Thames Colleges Group or a state non selective school as above;



- holds a firm offer to study on one of South Thames Colleges Group's higher education full time courses, starting in September 2020;
- is eligible to receive student finance (maintenance loan and tuition fee loan for UK students; tuition fee loan for EU students);
- has a household income assessed by Student Finance England (or equivalent) at £25,000 or less;
- lives at an address identified as IMD Quintile 1
- has not studied at university level before; and
- that neither parents hold a university-level qualification, or the applicant is a mature and independent student (over 21 years old on 1 September 2020).
- Will not have previously received a South Thames Colleges Group HE Bursary

### **Bursaries for Disabled students entering higher education courses at South Thames Colleges Group (Target PTS1,3 and PTP1)**

As part of newly targeted activity towards applicants with disabilities this specific bursary and spending is part of an increased overall spend on Access activity aimed at students with disabilities, and along with the spending outlined below in respect of HE Diagnostic Support Fund and additional staff support to assist such applicants is designed to assist in engaging students with disabilities to help them gain the advice and guidance that they need, which student feedback has identified has been less sought in the past in some parts of the college group due to a lower lack of recognition of help points in some parts compared to others.

The College will offer a new bursary scheme available to students with a disability progressing to a South Thames Colleges Group's full time Higher Education. Bursaries of £500 each will be paid (the whole amount payable in the year of study of the application), either as a partial fee discount on fees or as cash bursary. The eligibility for this bursary will be the same as mentioned for the Internal College and School Progression Bursary (above) apart from the additional requirement of evidence of disability.

### **Bursaries for Care Leavers entering higher education courses at South Thames Colleges Group (Target PTA3)**

A significant factor in the increase in spending on Access is associated with this specific activity aimed at supporting Care Leavers into HE, including the College's own. This plan has such activity as part of specifically targeted work and will absorb additional access expenditure compared with earlier years. The College will for 2020/21 extend the financial support (bursary scheme) for care leavers by providing this opportunity to three students entering both full and part time higher education courses for the first time, and make support available in all of their years of study. In the past Care Leavers were priority applicants for other bursaries but the College Group feels that to achieve real progress on encouraging and supporting Care leavers to apply to HE, and be successful, this support and opportunity needs to remain more visible. Bursaries of £500 each will be paid (the whole amount payable in the year of study of the application), either as a partial fee discount on fees or as cash. The eligibility for this bursary will be that the applicant;

- holds a firm offer to study at South Thames College Group, starting in September 2020;
- is eligible to receive student finance (maintenance loan and tuition fee loan for UK students; tuition fee loan for EU students);
- has a household income assessed by Student Finance England (or equivalent) at £25,000 or less;
- has not studied at university level before; and
- the applicant is a care leaver.

### **HE Diagnostic Support Fund (Targets PTA1,PTS1,3 PTP1)**

The College Group will make available in the enrolment period and Autumn Term 2020, for the first time, support to students with diagnostic assessment of disability eg dyslexia, dyspraxia. An amount of £300 each will be available to support diagnostic testing to assist students with DSA applications. Students who have had a previous such test post 16 will not be eligible.

### **Outreach access and success activities (Target PTA 1 and 3)**

South Thames Colleges Group's outreach programme will continue to encompass a number of widening participation activities which focus on under-represented groups within the Colleges' own communities, local boroughs of Kingston, Merton, Wandsworth and Sutton as well as the adjoining Boroughs of Elmbridge and Richmond upon Thames. The activities outlined immediately below on this page and below, include a major focus on access and helping younger students understand and recognise the opportunity of HE study and that is attainable for them, and in some cases are success focussed activities helping to uplift attainment and are aimed at the following groups of younger learners. The activities will be directed more than in the past at our target groups under this Access and Participation Plan rather than in the past when some of these internal college activities included the target groups but was also part of wider College activity.

- Disadvantaged socio-economic localities and communities and areas where there is low level of participation in Higher Education (as measured by POLAR data).
- Non selective state schools with records of lower levels of progression to higher education.
- Those without a family history of Higher Education, including care leavers.

The College Group will continue to support 6<sup>th</sup> Forms and year 10 and 11 groups with a range of activities including: Post 18 Options talks, Interview preparation and CV writing workshops, Higher Level Apprenticeships and work-based learning talks, Study Skills and Preparation for University Life sessions. These are aimed at uplifting aspiration and help to make HE study a realistic opportunity for those without a family history of HE and situated within areas of lower socio economic prosperity and HE participation.

Activities aimed at younger students have, and for 2020/21 onwards, will continue to include:

- Working with further education students within the College Group who are historically less likely to access HE, including students with an entitlement to free College meals and from areas where progression to HE is lower, and care leavers to raise aspirations and promote progression to vocational HE study.
- Working on access and success with relevant local partnerships/organisations such as Aim Higher London South and Linking London (see earlier section entitled “Partnerships”) to raise aspiration, motivation and achievement particularly with young people from lower socio economic settings and lower HE participation groupings, and care leavers including work with non-selective state schools, education business partnerships, and other career and advice providers.
- Providing internal progression events and HE Fairs which will, as in previous years, also be promoted to local schools and, will provide access support and advice and workshops on such things as student finance, financial planning, and with specific focus on debt consequences of study after graduation and career and employment potential post-graduation. This aimed particularly at students with no family history of HE, lower socio economic groupings and from areas of low HE Participation, and care leavers, where the perception of student debt may create a particular barrier to aspiration.
- Developing access by signposting progression routes from selected feeder schools in the local non-selective state sector into the College’s Higher Education provision which will attract learners from groupings with a lower HE participation rate and local learners including care leavers and students from poorer socio economic areas where studying near home may have advantages.
- The continuance of access activity and the 1:1 support for college students (via personal tutors and the Colleges’ Information Advice and Guidance teams) researching HE opportunities, supporting the making of choices, the completion of UCAS applications and appropriate confirming and signposting of HE progression routes. This is particularly important to promote access amongst those where there is no family history of HE, and support at home for these processes may be absent (including care leavers).
- Via the “Inspiring Futures” programme facilitate the meeting with, and presentations from past students who have progressed to HE and those students studying for a HE award in the College (these opportunities to be provided to L3 College learners and students studying in local state non-selective schools) which will uplift aspiration for HE and identify its relevance and availability and is particularly important to promote access amongst those where there is no family history of HE, for those with financial disadvantages and for care leavers.
- Engaging with our partner HEIs through Compact arrangements to facilitate progression routes for College Level 3 students and developing compact arrangements for schools in the local and neighbouring boroughs to our College based HE. Such activities are specifically aimed at students with no family history of HE, from lower socio economic groupings and areas of low HE participation. New arrangements have recently been agreed with a partner university located within the College Group’s catchment area (University of Roehampton), and will be an explicit component of our package of support for Access to HE offered to care leavers.
- Providing enhanced 1:1 information advice and guidance for late applicants to HE (for College students and students studying within the local borough and those adjoining and who will often be those with limited family history of HE, limited personal support such as care leavers and those from lower socio economic groupings perturbed by the perception of student debt), particularly during the Clearing period, and as appropriate additional entry support to the programme.

### **Retention and Success Activities and HE experience (Target PTS1,2,3,PTP1)**

Retention in year across all Higher Education within the college has been in excess of 95% in the past three years although the TEF continuation rate of learners is lower at 82.4% (and 1.2 percentage points below the benchmark).

The college will continue to enhance the success activities it already offers and the support students from the widening participation cohorts receive with the following activities. The College Group will increase from Summer 2020 (its implementation slightly delayed due to Covid-19 interruptions) its focus and targeting of this support to its priority areas of activity.

- Applicants meeting the minimum entry criteria are interviewed. This provides an opportunity to discuss the suitability of the course, review individual support needs and personal plans and ensure a successful match of course and choice, and the style of interaction with students with disabilities will be changed from Summer 2020 to maximise face to face discussion.
- Students are provided with a 1:1 tutorial entitlement with a named personal tutor to provide a source of advice and a means of monitoring performance. Examples of the high level of support offered to HE learners in the College continues to include the arrangements on the FdA Early Years Education, courses populated with adult/mature learners where each student in addition to their personal tutor has a work based mentor to help support them through their studies. These mentors are offered training and termly road shows, a regular newsletter to support their work. Previous students are also invited to speak to current students as a way of support and to build their confidence. The plans for the provision of this type of support to mature learners studying in the evening/weekends alongside work will be made more explicit and formal with effect from Autumn 2020.
- The opportunity to create a personalised individual learning plan, via the Pro Monitor system (a student performance monitoring system), which also provides the ongoing opportunity for the student and their tutor to monitor progress throughout the year. The opportunity this type of support to mature learners studying in the evening/weekends alongside work will be made more explicit and formal with effect from Autumn 2020.
- The provision of learning materials in a number of formats including hard copy, learning resources materials and via the virtual learning environment (Moodle) to match the range of needs of college learners and allow them to choose their preferred method will continue.
- Induction and progression programmes prepare students for new learning experiences and enhance their chances of success by helping them recognise the changes in the demand of courses at different levels. The provision of this type of support to mature learners studying in the evening/weekends alongside work will be made more explicit and formal, (with effect from Autumn 2020), and will include a larger component of induction made available remotely via the virtual learning environment.
- Whilst not linked to a particular target, close monitoring of attendance patterns and the follow up of unexplained absences by personal tutors via a variety of media supports learners with less disciplined and structured learning habits to be successful. In the Kingston College School of Business learners on full time courses who join with very modest prior academic achievement continue to benefit from the following practices; individual and personalised assignment tutorials and assignment feedback, very effective personal tutorial support, involvement and engagement with work place mentors, the accessibility of the teaching teams to students, both in person, remotely by phone and by email, and design of student friendly timetables. The introduction of an attendance monitor role for this group of learners, which will continue, was designed to provide a supportive but proactive function to help students with less well developed study skills to be more of their performance, including attendance and support and encourage them to develop improved independent study skills and behaviours. This has a particular relevance to actions in respect of closing gaps between black and white students in attainment and continuation as these courses have heavy students representation from this ethnic grouping.
- Induction programmes will continue to be structured and communicated to students in advance of use and reinforcement with further sessions can also be delivered by LRC staff during the year. Induction session content is routinely reinforced through information in Moodle. Induction and information skills delivery is regularly evaluated following student and staff feedback regarding effectiveness with considerations of when, how and to whom. These sessions are of particular value to the adult/mature learner who may have experienced a gap since their last formal learning experience but will also have particular relevance to actions in respect of closing gaps between black and white students in attainment and continuation as these courses have heavy students representation from this ethnic grouping.
- Promotion of independent learning through study skills and information skills sessions and study skills online guides will continue to be provided through LRC pages on Moodle. Information about the LRC services and resources are available to current students through Moodle. The College recognises that with its range of learners, and in the case of adult/mature learners some need for additional flexibility of delivery and therefore there is a strong emphasis on e-learning and schemes of work, and learning materials are accessible online by students at all times via Moodle.

- All of the above are designed as success and progression tools (and promoted to applicants and enquirers as access tools) and support all students in learning but have particular resonance for the non-traditional entrant eg mature learner, entrants from areas of lower participation and lower socio economic groups often with no previous family history of undergraduate study, and students with disabilities. These will also as stated above be of particular relevance to actions in respect of closing gaps between black and white students in attainment and continuation as these courses have heavy students representation from this ethnic grouping.

### **Student Support Services: (Target PTS1,2,3)**

The Student Support Teams comprise a group of experienced professionals who continue to provide a high quality service, including emergency support, to all students at all centres offering an accessible success focussed service across the week which can assist students with a range of support needs from mental health issues to housing crisis and help them still succeed and progress despite their difficulties.

The counselling service continues to be open to all students across the College centres. The Student Engagement Advisors and Counsellors offer support for a wide range of issues that arise for students. If more specialist help is required, then appropriate referral/signposting to outside organisations is sought.

### **Progression for HE learners from levels 4 and 5 (Target PTP1)**

Strong links with partner institutions continue to mean that students on Foundation Years, Foundation Degrees, HNCs and HNDs have clearly articulated and facilitated pathways to complete Bachelor degrees. For many of the current courses, the progression routes are clearly identified with a named course and HE partner and the expectation that students should progress (and to where) is explicitly stated (e.g. Foundation Year in Business (with pathways in: Management, Marketing, Accounting and Real Estate Management). There are continuing opportunities for students to progress internally within the College Group and convert a Higher National Certificate into a Diploma (a range of opportunities in Performing Arts and Sports), Top Up a Foundation Degree (eg. Art and Design), or Higher National Diploma, to a full Honours Degree (eg Business). All of these arrangements continue to provide more accessible progression to students less familiar with and less supported in their HE study such as students from families without HE experience and areas of lower HE participation, for adult/mature learners less familiar with application processes such as UCAS and for students with disabilities where study nearer to home and in more familiar settings may be advantageous.

### **Additional Learning Support (ALS): (Target PTA1,PTS1,3 and PTP1)**

South Thames College Group welcomes applications from all students. Each application is considered individually and the aim is to provide all students with high quality tuition and support. This is part of the College's wider commitment to equal opportunities. Help continues to be available for students who have a learning difficulty, disability or medical condition. The ALS Team is a group of specialist tutors and experienced Senior Learning Mentors and Learning Mentors. These provide an essential service to support the College's commitment to equality and diversity and to enhancing the learning experience of our students. The College is committed to providing support for students with disabilities, dyslexia and other learning differences and to continually improve this service. The ALS Team provides support and advice to students and is available to help with application and implementation on the Disabled Student's Allowance (DSA). ALS is actively involved in the admission of prospective students to the HE courses in the College Group and in working with curriculum teams during study. Students who have indicated a learning need or disability on application are contacted to establish their support needs prior to their enrolments. This is co-ordinated by a named ALS Manager who will support applicants and students with enquiries and applications for DSA and ensure curriculum areas are aware and able to provide the identified support need. Within the Schools with larger HE cohorts Student Learning Improvement Mentors (SLIMS) are placed to be available to HE learners to help with DSA applications and provide other and additional non funded support. The College is committed to support students that are not eligible for DSA but still would benefit from support and will make reasonable adjustments. The College also loans equipment such as adapted keyboard, mouse and advises on specialist software.

As mentioned elsewhere in this plan the College's progress with regard to recruitment of students with disabilities to HE has been less than successful (see assessment of performance), and student feedback identifies inconsistencies across the Colleges within the Group. The College's plans to better support this target group and from Summer 2020 for applicants and Autumn 2020 for new and continuing entrants to include a fuller development of earlier plans for;

- The publication of a new HE teaching and admissions staff guidance booklet on making reasonable adjustments and their role in the DSA process including at the interview stage.
- Increased and improved publicity about the availability of adapted equipment and specialist software to support learners to be independent.
- Increased allocation of access and success investment to support applicants and students with disabilities to access support and be more confident in their ability to succeed. This will include the allocation of funds to support students with upfront fees for diagnosis in advance of DSA approval.

## **Careers, Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG) - progression: (Target PTP1)**

The CIAG service within the College works to professional standards set within the Careers Guidance Practice Framework and offers impartial careers guidance, embracing the Widening Participation Agenda. Through targeted internal workshops, the team actively promote and encourage students, many first generation learners to research and access HE. The service offers one-to-one careers guidance to the wider community, many embarking on access courses. CIAG help to promote the Bursary Schemes throughout the year, both within the service and online; they also work closely with school liaison within universities. The service offers information and support around HE employability and career planning which is tailored to the needs of the students. Each academic year the team has organised a series of successful student finance events to raise awareness of support and loans available to HE students via Student Finance England (SFE) and University schemes. Local banks explain their own individual schemes and this has been particularly effective in helping those from lower income earning homes and students such as care leavers who may be concerned at the prospect of student debt. Support has included: one to one UCAS drop-in support, specialist appointments. HE partner institutions also run workshops for level 3 students at the College to help with UCAS applications and writing personal statements. These all raise aspirations, and for those college students from areas of lower HE participation and/or families with no history of HE study, including care leavers, help them recognise the relevance and attainability of such opportunities.

As a result of the assessment of performance appearing earlier in this plan there is a continuing need for higher levels of support for learners with disabilities as they approach the end of their study to enhance their opportunity for future employment and study.

## **3.2 Student consultation**

### **The student voice and student contributions to College plans**

The collection of the HE Student Voice adopted at the successor College, Kingston, has now grown from local programme and school feedback, to a more central structured whole College concern and has been formalised by the recent (Spring Term 2020) agreement of the College Group's HE Student Engagement Policy.

This more formal and coordinated approach to be implemented from Summer Term 2020 brings together elements of programme feedback and school focus group feedback into an HE Forum led by students. This feedback also feeds into the overall College Student Council. The key elements of feedback are: from focus groups, National Student Survey (NSS), , Staff Student Consultation Committees, HE representative training feedback, end of module and end of programme feedback and there is Student Governor representation on the Corporation Board . Other cross-College surveys include an LRC survey and an HE Admissions Survey which includes questions designed to establish the level of awareness of the different type of support for students (financial and others) and the level of satisfaction about information received and available about aspects of the student contract including admissions, finance arrangements and tuition fees. There has also been a cross college internal HE survey answered by students not eligible for the NSS, although this function is more limited this academic year 2019/2020 with the College Group taking part in the NSS pilot involving a wider audience of students on one year programmes as well as final year students.

The aims and purpose of the Access Agreement/Access and Participation Plan and the concept of "Fair Access" to HE and "Widening participation" in HE, has been for a number of years discussed at the College's HE Student Forum which meets termly (three times a year) and discusses;

- in the Autumn term meeting the College's assessment of performance of its widening participation activities is monitored, the impact of the current and past Access and Participation Plan and activities;
- in the Spring term meeting plans for the Access and Participation Plan due for submission for future academic years and proposed changes to existing arrangements are reviewed.
- In the Summer term, the meeting is more discursive in nature and capture students' ideas about effective widening participation activity.

The topic of “Fair Access” to HE and “Widening participation” in HE from Autumn 2020 is going to be introduced into the agenda of course based staff student consultation meetings and focus groups, too broaden the collection of opinion and also to obtain course/subject based input.

The HE Student Forum meetings continue to be attended by students of a variety of ages and backgrounds from a range of courses. The membership is made up of the elected student representatives of each HE course. Recent feedback from this group (the Spring 2020 HE Student Forum) which has had direct impact upon our plan and activities include – the first three of these feedback points in the table below are recognised in the plan, as changes from the past, and initial thinking, as a result of the specific student feedback heard in this meeting;

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Financial support to be available in other than the first year of study (see Financial Support Section)</li><li>• Some uncertainty about the availability of Student Services Support in some parts of the College Group including support for students with disabilities – now a key target area of activity – see page 9 and comments on page 7</li><li>• A continued inconsistency in application experience and information provision between colleges and courses with respect to financial matters and particularly with regard to college provided financial support, eg. bursaries and hardship funds – see actions in information section</li><li>• A continued concern particularly, amongst mature students, at the concept of “student debt” and its impact upon their family lives and ability to support their children’s aspirations for HE study. The workings of the Student Finance package with repayment linked to earning still seems misunderstood and mistrusted. This is especially so amongst mature learners.</li><li>• A lack of knowledge, understanding and confidence in the other routes to HE study, apart from the college/university route at 18/19 years, with for example the higher and degree apprenticeship opportunity being recognised as potentially very attractive but a lack of confidence in their availability and a lack of knowledge and application routes.</li><li>• A failure to close the feedback loop and provide students with updates on actions arising from feedback.</li></ul> |
|--|

The inconsistencies in applicant experience and information receipt mentioned above was heard a year earlier and led to the implementation of what was hoped to be a more consistent process for the provision of such information at a number of points in the student application, enrolment and induction cycle as explained in the Publication of Tuition Fees, Financial Support and Marketing section. The apparent lack of impact of such actions has led to further changes in processes across the College Group and from Autumn 2019 to more deeply embed the HE application and recruitment process into the College Group’s overarching Admissions system, and whilst maintaining its unique and critical, HE processes, benefit from the scale and standardised methodology of the larger college group function.

### 3.3 Evaluation strategy

The outcome of the College Group’s utilisation of the OfS self-assessment tool recognised that in all five aspects of performance – Strategic context, designing your programmes, designing impact evaluation, implementing evaluation and learning from evaluation the College was in an emerging state. The designing programmes was the most developed of these aspects. In earlier sections there has been recognition of an historical approach of broad activity insufficiently targeted and sometimes overlapping with other functions of a general further education college (all in some way beneficial to the principles of widening participation but not sufficiently focussed in design, implementation or evaluation to achieve the past objectives of Access and Participation Plans and Access Agreements. Of course, the College Group’s experience of these plans is by comparison to other HE providers very short.

With regard to the five aspects of performance the self-assessment tool helped recognise;

- Strategic context – an institutional need to recognise the specific and targeted activity of the Plan in the context of its HE at the same times as working synergistically with its HE linked FE progression activity for its L3 students
- Designing your programmes – the most developed of these aspects at programme level and an opportunity to maximise the sharing of good practice and the teaching, learning and assessment focus of a Further Education College rated Good at its 2020 Ofsted inspection.
- Designing impact evaluation – an area for significant development in terms of data collection and interpretation, described in detail in section “3.4 Monitoring progress against delivery of the plan” below. Also to encompass more targeted applicant and students feedback on activity.
- Implementing evaluation – this will be more evidence based (using the planned data above) and will be led by the structures explained in section “2 Strategic Measures”

- Learning from evaluation – a more reflective approach is required which is planned to be supported by a new Scholarship Policy (receiving formal committee approval during the Summer Term 2020 and to be published by end of July 2020) which will encourage College Leaders to engage with lecturing staff in the scholarship activity to enhance pedagogy.

The theory of change above identifies planned changes to support effective evaluation and, in the table below, is outlined how the development and implementation of HE Strategy for the College and its approach to widening participation including the development, implementation and management of this Access and Participation Plan pass through a series of College Group deliberative committees, and broader knowledge and awareness activity is undertaken at other College Meetings. The section earlier entitled “Strategic Measures” explains the particular role of the HE Matrix Meeting and the Annual Operating Plan as the driver of performance over the five-year period of the plan.

<p>The College Group's Quality, Learning and Standards Committee which meets termly is the principal Governor forum for the detailed analysis, evaluation and questioning of Access and Participation activity, and outcomes, and reports its finding and recommendations to the Corporation.</p>
<p>The College Group's Higher Education Matrix Meeting which meets monthly is responsible for the strategic direction of HE and access and participation activity and evaluation of impact (for report to Governors via the College's Group Leadership Team (GLT)).</p>
<p>The Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB) is a termly meeting which amongst other academic standard, learner experience and outcome analysis is responsible for the detailed analysis of access and participation impact and provides the HE Matrix Meeting with the detailed analysis to make strategic recommendations.</p>
<p>The Higher Education Operations Group (HEOG) is the termly held meeting that ensures that access and participation activity, admissions processes and promotion is taking place as planned and is being monitored via the College's Management Information and other systems.</p>
<p>The College's within the group hold weekly College Management Meeting via which knowledge, and awareness of access and participation activity is raised and in college activity implemented.</p>

The evaluation activity of the five functions/meetings above will be supported by evidence obtained from the monitoring activities explained below and will be presented in formal documentation including data in respect of programme outcomes such as continuation, progression, attainment and employment outcome data, student survey and feedback data, student characteristic data, enrolment and application data. These documents will include historical data for the purpose of trend analysis, and performance against targets. At programme level these documents are called “Programme Quality Monitoring” forms and are the output of course based review and reflection. The historical “College Quality Monitoring” form which reviewed each of the three Colleges within the Group that delivered HE separately, will be replaced in academic year 2020/21 with a “Group Quality Monitoring” process which will bring together all programme data for assessment at Group level and will analyse data on a risk based basis. The “Group Quality Monitoring” process will be the explicit responsibility of the Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB), which will produce for Group Leadership Team, for presentation at the College Group's Quality, Learning and Standards Governors' Committee a termly report including progress of the Group against APP activity and targets.

### 3.4 Monitoring progress against delivery of the plan

As with the research underpinning this Access and Participation Plan, the College Group will use the data provided by the OfS Access and Participation Dashboard, TEF data, data from university partners and continue to develop internal management information systems to assess performance.

The College Group has, a little later than planned and previously stated (from Autumn 2019), adopted a single student registration and information system. This provides data about students from five underrepresented groups;

- Students from areas of low higher education participation identified by postcode and classified under 5 POLAR quintiles
- Students of particular ethnicities – there will be 18 different ethnicities available for selection by a student
- Mature students – identified by age
- Disabled students – students will be able to identify disabilities from 20 categories (and identify all relevant disabilities and a primary one)
- Care leavers

This data will permit during Academic Year 2020/2021, and going forward, the Group to monitor performance, identify trends, measure success against milestones and evaluate the impact of activities and financial support by reviewing data in connection with;

- Applications, enrolments, completion, continuation (from year one studies), progression and achievement
- Other data – qualitative and quantitative – will be obtained by survey of applicants and students, and feedback from focus groups to understand the impact of activity and challenges remaining unsupported

This data will support the Group to analyse potential equality gaps in sub groups (eg. specific ethnicities) and explore intersections of disadvantage (eg. disabled students from low socio economic backgrounds) and understand how to make future years' activity more effective.

The College Group will continue to evaluate the impact of its financial support activities by reviewing the performance of the individual students benefiting from the support (bursaries and hardship funds) with particular respect to their status in connection with;

- Retention (in year), continuation (from first year of study to second), progression in subsequent years, achievement and post course progression to employment/further study
- Interviews and surveys will be undertaken with students receiving this support to identify how, and the extent of positive impacts upon their performance and any continuing challenges of their personal financial situation that the support has not impacted. These two actions will represent a more formal application of the survey aspect of the OfS financial support evaluation toolkit.

The College Group will review its outreach access activities, which incorporate internal college and school activity and from Autumn 2020 will monitor this in a more focussed way than in the past by reviewing specific activity and specific impact, in line with the theory of change principles and considering;

- School/college type and cohort and student/pupil characteristics, interacted with, progression and achievement data of those pupils
- and feedback from students attending such events and school link representatives.

As explained in other parts of the Plan a series of deliberative committees will have a function in the monitoring of this plan, as well as student monitoring (the Autumn term meeting the HE Student Forum will assess the performance of its widening participation activities, the impact of the current and past Access and Participation Plan and activities).

The Assistant Principal for HE and Business Development will ensure that the HE Student Forum (see above – annually at the Autumn term meeting) and the following College and Governor meetings have the necessary data and feedback to effectively monitor the progress of the plan and take necessary corrective and sustaining actions;

- The College Group's Quality, Learning and Standards Committee is the principal Governor forum for the detailed analysis, evaluation and questioning of Access and Participation activity, and outcomes, and reports its findings and recommendations to the Corporation.
- The College Group's Higher Education Matrix Meeting which meets monthly is responsible for the strategic direction of HE and access and participation activity and evaluation of impact (for report to Governors via the College's Group Leadership Team (GLT)). Over the five year span of the Plan it will be the role of this Matrix Group to respond to the detailed analysis of progress on access, success and progression produced by the meeting group described below, (HEAB), and implement corrective and/or sustaining actions (as appropriate) across the College Group via the various operational meetings mentioned below. The monitoring of the outcomes of the Access and Participation Plan is a component part of the HE Annual Operating Plan. This is monitored, reported upon [to GLT and to the Governor's Learning and Standards Committee] by the HE Matrix Meeting. As part of this overall process, the impact of the financial support mechanisms will be monitored (in the Autumn term) and this will consider the demand for the different bursaries, the number of eligible applicants, number and values approved, evidence from student feedback of other student groups that could benefit, and the impact upon success and progression that past awards have had including feedback from beneficiaries and a review of that group's progression and success.



- The Higher Education Academic Board (HEAB) is a termly meeting which amongst other academic standard, learner experience and outcome analysis is responsible for the detailed analysis of access and participation impact and provides the HE Matrix Meeting with the detailed analysis to make strategic recommendations.

## 4 Provision of information to students

### Publication of Tuition Fees, Financial Support and Marketing and the Admission Service

The Group's marketing for Higher Education provision consists of a wide range of local and regional promotional activities including: the colleges' websites, e-marketing, promotional videos, WhatUni, Hot Courses, social media, pan-London and National press, and radio advertising. Membership of UCAS and attendance at events facilitates awareness and participation locally, nationally and internationally. The Group publishes an undergraduate prospectus which has overarching information about courses available, support, student finance and directs applicants and enquires for the up to date tuition fee, and other costs data.

The websites are signposted as the most up to date source of information and advice due to the lead in time needed to create the prospectus. Each college within the Group continues to use its local brand name eg. Kingston College, Carshalton College etc. and websites are maintained for each of the different colleges. Currently the Group operates four individual college websites; each of these platforms features an Undergraduate landing page, tailored to HE audiences. These highlight subject specific opportunities as well as support available for learners studying on HE programmes. The website is compliant with BS8878 Web Accessibility Code of Practice which ensures the following groups can navigate the website: Dyslexia sufferers, those with English as a second language, those with colour blindness, those who are deaf and hard of hearing and use a personal reader and those suffering from Epilepsy.

Each websites' undergraduate section includes information and guidance about;

- tuition fees, student finance
- and bursaries and hardship funds will be displayed.

Tuition fees are also;

- detailed in offer letters to applicants along with bursaries and financial support (such as hardship funds) information
- Staff involved with interviews and auditions are trained to ensure information and guidance about tuition fees, student finance and bursaries and hardship funds are included as part of that activity (hard copy information is available) and are again available at point of acceptance and enrolment.
- The College's HE Admissions Team advises Student Finance England via the appropriate student loan portal of each course's tuition fee and appears in the Student Loan Portal.
- This Access and Participation Plan will be published on all relevant college websites for the duration of the study period of students affected by the plan.
- Students in study are reminded of the availability of the support above in course handbooks, at induction and in course tutorial. The support is promoted on the front page of the College's VLE.

The College Group's Admissions work is reviewed by the Higher Education Operations Group as well as the Higher Education Academic Board to ensure that the Group's Admissions, Clearing and HE Enrolment processes respond to the changing HE landscape and are applicant/student friendly and CMA compliant.

The College Group makes full use of its UCAS membership, which raises its profile regionally and nationally. The HE admissions processes are governed by an Undergraduate Admissions Policy which guides a centrally directed but locally delivered process ensuring consistency and fairness at all times of the group-wide procedures and underlying activities such as UCAS, CMA, reporting and Service Level Agreements.

## 5. Appendix – Targets, Investment summary and Fee summary (separate document)

Please see page 3 comments about the recent decline in the HE student numbers and the resultant impact upon the level of investment the College can provide to support activities.

## Summary of 2020-21 entrant course fees

\*course type not listed

## Inflationary statement:

We do not intend to raise fees annually

Table 4a - Full-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants

Full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	Full time Top Up honours degrees validated by University of Roehampton (CC)	£6,350
First degree	Full time honours degrees - BA (Hons) Integrative Relational Counselling (KC)	£5,625
First degree	Full time honours degrees validated by Kingston University and University of West London (KC)	£7,725
Foundation degree	Full time foundation degrees validated by Kingston University and University of Roehampton (KC&CC)	£6,350
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	Full time HNC/Ds with additional delivery costs - Performing Arts (General and Technical) and International Travel and Tourism	£5,625
HNC/HND	Full time HNC/Ds with highest delivery costs	£6,350
HNC/HND	Full time HNC/Ds with standard delivery costs - Performing Arts (Dance and Acting), Creative Media, Art and Design	£5,100
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4b - Sub-contractual full-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants

Sub-contractual full-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4c - Part-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants

Part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	Part time HNC/D with highest delivery costs - Engineering	£3,950
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

Table 4d - Sub-contractual part-time course fee levels for 2020-21 entrants

Sub-contractual part-time course type:	Additional information:	Course fee:
First degree	*	*
Foundation degree	*	*
Foundation year/Year 0	*	*
HNC/HND	*	*
CertHE/DipHE	*	*
Postgraduate ITT	*	*
Accelerated degree	*	*
Sandwich year	*	*
Erasmus and overseas study years	*	*
Other	*	*

# Targets and investment plan 2020-21 to 2024-25

Provider name: South Thames Colleges Group

Provider UKPRN: 10003674

## Investment summary

The OfS requires providers to report on their planned investment in access, financial support and research and evaluation in their access and participation plan. The OfS does not require providers to report on investment in student success and progression in the access and participation plans and therefore investment in these areas is not recorded here.

### Note about the data:

The investment forecasts below in access, financial support and research and evaluation does not represent not the total amount spent by providers in these areas. It is the additional amount that providers have committed following the introduction of variable fees in 2006-07. The OfS does not require providers to report on investment in success and progression and therefore investment in these areas is not represented.

The figures below are not comparable to previous access and participation plans or access agreements as data published in previous years does not reflect latest provider projections on student numbers.

Table 4a - Investment summary (£)

Access and participation plan investment summary (£)	Academic year				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
<b>Total access activity investment (£)</b>	£39,500.00	£39,500.00	£39,500.00	£39,500.00	£39,500.00
Access (pre-16)	£10,000.00	£10,000.00	£10,000.00	£10,000.00	£10,000.00
Access (post-16)	£20,000.00	£20,000.00	£20,000.00	£20,000.00	£20,000.00
Access (adults and the community)	£2,000.00	£2,000.00	£2,000.00	£2,000.00	£2,000.00
Access (other)	£7,500.00	£7,500.00	£7,500.00	£7,500.00	£7,500.00
<b>Financial support (£)</b>	£29,500.00	£29,500.00	£29,500.00	£29,500.00	£29,500.00
<b>Research and evaluation (£)</b>	£12,000.00	£12,000.00	£12,000.00	£12,000.00	£12,000.00

Table 4b - Investment summary (HFI%)

Access and participation plan investment summary (%HFI)	Academic year				
	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25
<b>Higher fee income (£HFI)</b>	£160,320.00	£165,700.00	£169,075.00	£169,075.00	£169,075.00
<b>Access investment</b>	8.4%	8.1%	8.0%	8.0%	8.0%
<b>Financial support</b>	5.9%	5.7%	5.6%	5.6%	5.6%
<b>Research and evaluation</b>	2.5%	2.4%	2.4%	2.4%	2.4%
<b>Total investment (as %HFI)</b>	16.8%	16.3%	16.0%	16.0%	16.0%

# Targets and investment plan 2020-21 to 2024-25

Provider name: South Thames Colleges Group

Provider UKPRN: 10003674

## Targets

Table 2a - Access

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Description (500 characters maximum)	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones					Commentary on milestones/targets (500 characters maximum)
								2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	
To reduce the gap in participation (access) in HE for disabled students (FT)	PTA_1	Disabled	Comparative % of FT student population	No	The access and participation dataset	2017-18	10%	12	13	14	16	17	To increase number of disabled students in STCG and effectively close gap in STCG % of FT student population in comparison to all UK HE Providers
To reduce the gap in participation (access) in HE for students from lower participation, household income backgrounds	PTA_2	Low Participation Neighbourhood (LPN)	% gap between part time students from Polar quintile 1 and 5	No	The access and participation dataset	2017-18	17%	16	12	8	4	0	To close gap in STCG % of PT student population in comparison to all UK HE Providers
To uplift the opportunity of HE study for care leavers	PTA_3	Care-leavers	To increase the number of care leavers studying at STCG into HE	Yes	Other data source	2019-20	0%	2	4	6	8	10	To support a higher proportion of Care Leavers from STCG into HE than the national average (6% - 2018)
	PTA_4												
	PTA_5												
	PTA_6												
	PTA_7												
	PTA_8												

Table 2b - Success

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Description	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones					Commentary on milestones/targets (500 characters maximum)
								2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	
To reduce the non continuation gap for mature students	PTS_1	Mature	Percentage difference in (gap) in non continuation for mature learners	No	The access and participation dataset	2016-17	19%	15	11	7	3	0	To close STCG gap between non continuation % for disabled learners compared with the non continuation % for students without disability
To reduce the gap in non continuation for the disaggregated group - black students compared with white students	PTS_2	Ethnicity	Percentage difference in (gap) in non continuation for full time black learners compared to white learners	No	The access and participation dataset	2016-17	13%	11	8	5	3	0	To close STCG gap between non continuation % for black learners compared with the non continuation % for white students
To reduce the gap in attainment for the disaggregated group- black students compared with white students	PTS_3	Ethnicity	Percentage difference in (gap) in attainment for black learners compared to white learners	No	The access and participation dataset	2017-18	22%	21	18	14	10	5	To close STCG gap between attainment in black learners compared with the attainment rate of white learners
To reduce the gap in non continuation rates between full time students living in IMD quintile 1 and those living in quintile 5	PTS_4	Socio-economic	Percentage difference in (gap) in non-continuation between students from IMD quintile 1 and IMD quintile 5	No	The access and participation dataset	2016-17	24%	23	20	15	10	5	To close the STCG gap in non continuation rates between students from IMD quintile 1 and IMD quintile 5
To reduce the gap in attainment rates between students in full time study and living in IMD quintile 1 and those in quintile 5	PTS_5	Socio-economic	Percentage difference in (gap) in attainment between students from IMD quintile 1 and IMD quintile 5	No	The access and participation dataset	2017-18	18%	17	14	10	5	0	To close the STCG gap in attainment rates between students from IMD quintile 1 and IMD quintile 5
To reduce the gap in non continuation for the disaggregated group- Asian students compared with white students	PTS_6	Ethnicity	Percentage difference in (gap) in non continuation for Asian learners compared to white learners	No	The access and participation dataset	2016-17	18%	17	14	10	5	0	To close STCG gap between non continuation in Asian learners compared with the non continuation rate of white learners
	PTS_7												
	PTS_8												

Table 2c - Progression

Aim (500 characters maximum)	Reference number	Target group	Description	Is this target collaborative?	Data source	Baseline year	Baseline data	Yearly milestones					Commentary on milestones/targets (500 characters maximum)
								2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	

