



2019-20 access and participation plan monitoring

Provider impact report

This impact report summarises the progress made by South Thames Colleges Group against targets, objectives and written commitments set out in its 2019-20 access and participation plan. This document is a summary of information submitted by the provider to the OfS. This document is a self-report by the provider only and does not indicate any OfS assessment of compliance.

1. Ambition and strategy

South Thames Colleges Group's ambition and strategy as detailed in the 2019-20 access and participation plan:

The South Thames Colleges Group's 2019/2020 Access and Participation Plan, authorised by the Office for Students, does not contain a section explicitly entitled "Ambitions and Strategy".

Accordingly, the following, fully referenced, extracts have been drawn from page 1 of the Plan to explain the College Group's context and short period of existence and its ambitions and strategy (the Group of Colleges having only been formed on 1 August 2017, operating as separate institutions before that date – page 1, section entitled “Introduction to the College and its component parts”).

- “This fifth Access and Participation Plan which represents the second of the merged College Group looks to confirm a more rationalised and simpler set of fee arrangements for the new merged entity by reducing the number of different tuition fee amounts charged, making these more consistent across the College Group (which in a number of cases means that students will pay a reduced fee). This plan also confirms the opportunity for the College Group to apply index linked tuition fee rises which are available as a result of the College Group's receipt of a Bronze Award under the Teaching Excellence and Outcomes Framework published in June 2018. The Plan also outlines the College Group's objectives (milestones), and activities in respect of its widening participation activities through the student lifecycle – access, success and progression” – (page 5, section “History of Access Agreements”)
- “Planned widening participation activity in the context of Access Agreements [and Access and Participation Plan] have only been in place for the past three academic years [2015/18] at Kingston College, only for one year [2018] at South Thames College and just the current academic year [2017/18] at Carshalton College.” (page 5, section “History of Access Agreements”).
- “In deciding this [the merger of three Colleges and the creation of STCG] Governors adopted a vision for the new College Group that built on the historic legacies of the Colleges, the historical focus on teaching, learning, achievement and employability and explained in the consultation document that “the benefits and opportunities [of merger] will be achieved as a result of the organisation's core goal to achieve outstanding results. Success will be judged by students' achievements and their progression into higher study or sustainable careers, with a focus on Specialisation, Diversification, Responsiveness and Improvement”. (page 2, section entitled “The South Thames College Group – a new college for south west London – rationale for change - ethos and vision”).
- “Above all South Thames Colleges' Group, as were its individual predecessor colleges, is a learning and teaching institution that welcomes a very diverse profile of students and supports excellent teaching. The focus upon learners, inclusion, social mobility and communities” (page 3, section entitled “The South Thames College Group – a new college for south west London – rationale for change - ethos and vision”).
- As “The College Group's published Equality Policy [which appears in full in the Plan] and 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 on pages 12 and 13, [to] “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 on pages 13 and 14 in the section entitled “Retention and Success Activities and HE experience” and our support for learners with disabilities is outlined on page 15. The section in the plan on pages 5 -9 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” (page 4, section entitled “South Thames Colleges Group's commitment to Equality, Diversity and Widening Participation”).
- Within the Access and Participation Plan the opportunity for the new College Group to provide a consistent level of support to all HE students across the colleges, which were previously separate, is explained; for example, financial support, including bursaries, “is available to support learners from the above groups at all of the Colleges” (page 10, section entitled “Financial Support”), and “ 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” (page 15, section entitled “Additional Learning Support”), for example, by way of a new central contact for applicants to discuss their support needs and DSA applications. Page 17, and the section entitled “Partnership working - AimHigher London South (AHLs)” explains how the Group and “young people from non-traditional backgrounds” across the entire group will benefit from collaborative working with AimHigher, previously only a Kingston College collaboration.

2. Self-assessment of targets

The tables that follow provide a self-assessment by South Thames Colleges Group of progress against the targets approved in its 2019-20 access and participation plan.

Please note the tables contain only a summary of target milestones approved in 2019-20 access and participation plans. Full information can be found in **Table 8a – statistical targets and milestones** and **Table 8b – Other milestones and targets** of South Thames Colleges Group's 2019-20 [access and participation plan](#).

Any optional commentary provided against the targets is given in [Annex B](#).

Statistical targets and milestones

Reference Number (lifecycle stage)	Description	Baseline year	Baseline data	2018-19 milestone	2019-20 milestone	Units of target	Comparison year	Actual performance in comparison year	Target self-assessment
T16a_01 (Access)	1. Maintain the percentage of HE students from an ethnic minority background (56% non-British).	2016-17	merged college data 2016/17	56%	56%	Percentage	2019-20	48	No progress
T16a_02 (Access)	2. Identify across the extended college catchment area five target areas where white young British male participation rates in HE are lower than national averages which will contribute to an increase the number of students joining College HE courses from disadvantaged/low participation post codes (measured by POLAR classification and numbers of students derived from localities in quintiles 1 and 2) by 9 percentage points annually;	2016-17	merged college data 2016/17	+9%	9%	Percentage	2019-20	-47	No progress
T16a_03 (Access)	3. Increase the number of students progressing within the College to HE provision by 10%pa (Non compound%)	2016-17	merged college data 2016/17	+10% students from STCG	+10% students from STCG	Percentage	2019-20	-5	No progress
T16a_04 (Access)	4. Increase the percentage of disabled students studying on College HE courses to 15%pa (non compound%).	2016-17	merged college data 2016/17	+15%	+15%	Percentage	2019-20	17	Expected progress
T16a_05 (Access)	5. Increase the number of Level 3 students from the College progressing to study HE [at any institution] by 2% (non compound%).	2016-17	merged college data 2016/17	+2%	+2%	Percentage	2019-20	-5	No progress

T16a_06 (Access)	6. Study skills sessions offered as part of the College's outreach programme with target schools will look to uplift the attainment of those students identified by the partner school as "at risk" to the extent that 40% achieve target grades and 30% exceed their targets	Other (please give details in Description column)	national benchmarks	40% achieve target - 30% exceed target	40% achieve target - 30% exceed target	Percentage	2019-20	0	No progress
T16a_07 (Access)	7. Increase the number of mature students (aged 21+) studying at the College by 7.5%pa(non compound).	2016-17	new merged college data 2016/17	+7.5%	+7.5%	Percentage	2019-20	-30	No progress
T16a_08 (Student success)	8.Ensure across the new and extended college the application of consistent and accessible academic and other support services 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%. Also a particular focus to reduce continuation gap in adult / mature learners and BME students	2016-17	TEF data Oct 2017	min 88% ach. & Max 12% non contin.	min 88% ach.& max 12% non contin	Percentage	2019-20	93	Expected progress
T16a_09 (Progression)	9. increase the percentage of students into positive employment/further study destinations to 88%. Also a particular focus on learners with disabilities, learners from low socio economic groupings and BME students	2016-17	new merged college data	88%	89%	Percentage	2019-20	89	Expected progress

Other milestones and targets

Reference Number (lifecycle stage)	Description	Baseline year	Baseline data	2018-19 milestone	2019-20 milestone	Units of target	Comparison year	Actual performance in comparison year	Target self-assessment
T16b_01 (Access)	10. Outreach activities undertaken in partnership with AimHigher S London/HE London to be further extended to entire enlarged college catchment area and to include minimum of 10 new schools and positively influence the awareness of the range of HE progression opportunities available (this uplift in awareness to be measured by pupil survey activity following the school events - compared to prior knowledge)	2016-17	new merged college data	10 new schools (250 students)	10 new schools (300 students)	Headcount	2019-20	12	Expected progress

3. Investment commitments

3.1. Access and participation investment for the last audited year

Please note that some differences in predicted vs actual spend may be due to reporting differences between academic and financial years.

Financial year	2019-20		
	Predicted spend (£)	Actual spend (£)	Difference (ppt)
Access investment	£4,000.00	£8,000.00	100%
Financial Support	£57,500.00	£18,000.00	-69%

4. Action plan

Where progress was less than expected South Thames Colleges Group has made the following commitments to increase the rate of progress against their targets.

Reference Number	Steps that will be taken in the future to make expected progress against target
T16a_01	The College Group continues to have a very diverse student population (at both FE and HE levels) but is unlikely to again reach the past level of diversity in the total (franchised and direct) student population as this was so very significantly influenced by the cessation of the course mentioned earlier in column V
T16a_02	"Transition" project delivery, which currently is online, will be remodelled post pandemic to embrace face to face elements
T16a_03	Continued development of new and relevant HE curriculum, and pathways, driven by new Head of Higher Education and supported by internal progression processes including the internal "Gold Application" (much appreciated by students for its ease and convenience for them) and the now differentiated and more regular HE Open Days
T16a_05	The College Group has a number of strategies to increase its younger, and other cohorts, who have the ambition to progress to HE and thus indirectly impact upon this target
T16a_06	Collection of data from past activity to be resumed and face to face Study Sessions to be resumed post Pandemic

T16a_07	<p>The percentage of mature (aged 21+) students at the College Group (HE direct 65%, total including franchise also 65%) remains significantly above the sector average (OfS APP Dashboard) of 30.2% . This is evidence of the Group's continued focus on lifelong learning and the provision of a number of courses at levels 4 and 5, including HNC/Ds and Foundation Degrees which are designed to provide those in work to develop their careers</p>
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5. Confirmation

South Thames Colleges Group confirms that:

Student engagement	
Have you worked with your students to help them complete the access and participation plan monitoring student submission?	
Yes	
Have you engaged with your student body in the design, evaluation, and monitoring of the plan?	
No	
Verification and sign off	
South Thames Colleges Group has confirmed that the information included in this impact report is accurate, that it has been compiled in line with OfS guidance, and that it is being submitted on behalf of the governing body of the provider.	
Yes	
Accountable officer sign off	
Name	Peter Mayhew-Smith
Position	Group Principal & CEO

Annex A: Commentary on progress against targets

South Thames Colleges Group's commentary where progress against targets was less than expected.

Target reference number: T16a_01
How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target?
HE student population has changed significantly since Merger in 2017 with decline in overall numbers and most significantly for this target the relocation of the Group's largest franchised, and most diverse course back into the university partner - that course's last cohort comprised 284 students of which 226 were from non white backgrounds (79%) and is the single biggest factor for the drop in non white student population.
Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone?
The College Group continues to have a very diverse student population (the non white student population % is still higher than the overall sector) and its strategy in this respect is unchanged - changes in student population make up has been explained by reference to an exceptional factor in column V

Target reference number: T16a_02
How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target?
Target areas identified but this new target and activity has not made progress and actual number of young male students from POLAR 1 and 2 quintiles has decreased by 9 (student numbers) in the past year.
Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone?
Partly resulting from Pandemic impacts the Group has entered into two new "transition" projects which are being delivered differently and aspire to capture this potential cohort

Target reference number: T16a_03
How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target?
Competition from universities and private providers has adversely impacted the Group's HE provision and, for example, has led to the withdrawal of an HND and Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care, BAs in Live Sound Engineering and Games Art and reduction in student numbers on Acting, Creative and Art and Design courses, all of which were historically successful in attracting internal applicants. Whilst the percentage of HE students that progressed internally is little changed, the number has declined as the overall HE offer has shrunk. The single area of internal growth, which exceeded the target growth %, has been from L3 Engineering to L4 Engineering (studying part time)
Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone?

The appointment to a new post of Head of Higher Education (2019/2020) has provided a cross Group resource to focus on internal progression to College Group courses via subject pathways, and to work with university partners to identify and develop new curriculum to attract internal students and provide. Pandemic driven online and more regular HE Open Days have been helpful to students and applicants in identifying sources of relevant information and guidance for HE progression separate from the past pan Group Open Days

Target reference number: T16a_05

How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target?

The number of L3 students progressing to HE in any setting has fallen, not because of any less effectiveness in supporting ambitions, nor due to any decline in student intentions but due to a substantial decline in 16-19 student numbers, within the College Group, in the years since merger (-12.5%). In percentage terms there is actually a small rise in progression to HE.

Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone?

No - successful strategies to support students with their ambitions into HE - colum V explains the extraneous impact of a smaller student population aspiring to progress and the maintenance of past proportions progressing

Target reference number: T16a_06

How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target?

Whilst face to face Study Sessions in schools were offered in years proceeding Pandemic, these were not continued in 2019/2020 and online activity replaced them. Collection of data in respect of progress has been interrupted

Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone?

During Pandemic Period activity with schools has partially taken place on line and future models will likely include blended face to face and online methodology

Target reference number: T16a_07

How have you met the commitments in your plan related to this target?

The Group's HE student population has fallen significantly since merger as a result of a combination of factors, the challenge of competition, changes to arrangements with university partners (above) and the withdrawal of a significant sub contracting arrangement. This has led to a decline not only in the total number of students but also the number of mature students aged 21+

Have you taken any additional steps other than that detailed in the plan to reach the selected milestone?

The appointment to a new post of Head of Higher Education (2019/2020) has provided a cross Group resource to focus on internal progression to College Group courses via subject pathways, and to work with university partners to identify and develop new curriculum to attract internal (and other) applicants. There has been a particular focus of activity to uplift the previously disappointing level of internal progression from the Group's Access courses.

Annex B: Optional commentary on targets

South Thames Colleges Group's commentary on any of the targets listed in [Section 2](#).

Reference Number	Optional commentary
T16a_01	The diversity of the College Group's HE Direct population percentage has reduced less than the total HE population with the 2019/2020 non white population standing at 39%, a reduction of just 4 percentage points from the previous year
T16a_02	Interestingly if students actually aged 21 were included there would be progress almost in line with this target which may indicate that the activity with this cohort takes longer to impact and impacts at different stages in their lives compared to other POLAR quintile students
T16a_03	Intense competition from universities and private providers, which are particularly prominent in London and relevant to Creative, Art, Design and Acting courses which have been crucial to the Group's past success, remains a major challenge for a Further Education Group operating in London
T16a_04	Significant progress - OfS APP Dashboard indicates just 5% of HE direct population identified disabilities at point of merger (2016/17). Now disabled students represent 17% of direct HE students(in line with the OfS Sector average 16.6% (OfS APP dashboard), 15% of total HE students (including franchise).
T16a_05	The Group remains one of the larger feeder institutions to HE in the UK and the quality of its support for students progressing to HE continues to be acknowledged by all stakeholders including Ofsted
T16a_06	Group remains a member of AimHigher SW London but its work with this body during the pandemic has been reduced as it was in 2018/19 for staffing reasons
T16a_07	The non-achievement of this target, which was set as a student number target, is not reflective of the College Group's focus and success in providing opportunities for those wishing to develop their education at L4 and above at different stages in their lives but is more reflective of the significant changes in the Group's overall HE population.
T16a_08	Completion rates relate to HE Direct delivery only
T16a_09	Overall % of HE direct students into positive destinations "as expected"but still a gap between progression of BAME students and those from lower socio economic groups (this latter group contains a small number of students
T16b_01	Expected progress in W/P activity in new schools across catchment area - collection of impact on student participants incomplete partly due to Pandemic impacts