**The Cornwall College Group Higher Education Strategy**

**1. Introduction**

Higher Education (HE) should be a transformational experience for the student and have broader aims than the gaining of a qualification. The opportunities for positive, personal change that it can and should produce must underpin every aspect of the design, and realisation of the HE experience, and this strategy should be viewed and implemented with that in mind.

This HE Strategy articulates with the overall Cornwall College Group Strategy and its Teaching, Training and Learning Strategy. It is informed by the values and mission of the Group, the needs of its students and those of their actual and potential employers. It is also informed by the learning and teaching policies and strategies of its principal partner, Plymouth University, as well as developments in the wider external environment at local, regional and national level.

**The Aim of the Strategy**

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| **Cornwall College Group Strategic Plan** | **Cornwall College Group HE Strategy** |
| **Aim 1: Students**  To provide an outstanding experience to all learners, to ensure that the Cornwall College Group is the provider of choice in Cornwall and the South West | * To provide an outstanding experience to all HE learners. * To continue to widen participation in HE, subject to availability of funded learner numbers, with a particular focus on Cornwall’s HE participation cold spots. * To offer scholarships and bursaries that support participation from individuals who face the greatest challenges. |
| **Aim 2: Curriculum and Quality**  To provide a wide range of courses that meet the needs of learners, prepares them for success in the global economy and is delivered to a level of quality that places the Group in the top 10% of all colleges nationally. | * To provide a wide range of HE courses that meet the needs of learners and the regional economy. * To further improve quality by: * Strengthening initial guidance and support to ensure learners are on the appropriate course. * Ensuring assessment of learner needs and the provision of timely and appropriate support. * Monitoring attendance and progress to identify learners at risk and to focus on helping them to overcome issues. * A focus on developing curricula and learning and teaching practice to ensure students have an engaging and stimulating experience. * .ensuring that students get timely and formative feedback and are well supported through an effective tutorial system. * Rigorous self-evaluation and implementation of improvement plans. |
| **Aim 3: Working with Employers**  To respond to the needs of the economy and employers by providing training and development that is high quality and meets needs in order to achieve a positive economic impact. | * To involve employers in the development and continued updating of the Higher Education curriculum. * To embed employability and enterprise across the HE curriculum. * To support all learners in securing effective work based or work related experiences, where appropriate. * To develop and deliver flexible and part time HE which is appropriate to the needs of local business. |
| **Aim 4: Collaborations and Partnerships**  To work in partnership with organisations that fit our mission | * To continue to work in partnership with Plymouth University and Coventry University to validate the Group’s HE Programmes and offer enhanced opportunities for our learners. * To participate fully in the CUC Partnership in the achievement of its aims and objectives. |
| **Aim 5: Staff**  To recruit, develop and retain staff to ensure a motivated, high quality and professionally qualified workforce. | * To employ and retain appropriately qualified staff to teach and support HE learners. * To provide staff teaching and supporting HE with appropriate and relevant development opportunities. * To support scholarly activity and research appropriate to maintaining academic standards on all HE programmes. |
| **Aim 6: Governance and Management**  The Cornwall College Group will govern and manage itself effectively and efficiently. | * To provide clear strategic and operational management to HE provision, enabling it to flourish |
| **Aim 7: Estates and Learning Resources**  To provide excellent space and learning resources for learners and staff, in a way that minimises the Group’s negative impact on the environment. | * To ensure that Higher Education students are provided with resources appropriate to their studies. * To provide access to learning resources and peer to peer learning through development of the virtual learning environment and other online access points. |

**Measuring Success**

The Group’s Strategic Plan has a five year focus. The Board reviews and sets targets to the Strategic Plan on an annual basis.

**2. Institutional Context**

The Strategy is informed by the Cornwall College Group’s mission and core values, namely:

"To provide Cornwall with a high quality student experience, celebrated through academic achievement, personal development and employability."

Value one: Putting the student first

Value two: Value and respect for others

Value three: Responsiveness to others

Value four: High quality in all we do

Value five: Responsibility – individual and team

Value six: Pride in what we do

Cornwall College is in a county with high economic deprivation, a largely rural population and historically low participation in HE. In rising to these challenges, The Cornwall College Group has developed a large FE and HE provision that is spread over seven sites, with HE opportunities on all campuses. The Group has a history of HE provision spanning several decades, providing a range of HE opportunities within Cornwall for students who otherwise may not have had the chance to benefit from an HE experience. Its history of widening participation, consistent emphasis on equipping its students for employment and its higher level skills provision chimes well with regional and national needs and policies.

**Aim 1: Students**

**Student Experience**

The Cornwall College Group seeks to provide students with the best possible educational experience delivered where and when it is most appropriate to the student need. In keeping with the Group mission, Government priorities and the economic and social well being of the Peninsula, we will develop programmes and employ pedagogies that promote learning in the workplace and at a distance as well as on campus. Such preparation for, and interaction with, the workplace is at the core of foundation degrees, but we will also continue to develop other HE vehicles which may better fit the needs of those in work. We will move towards a student-centred learning culture. This may be expressed in different ways depending upon the needs of different students and subjects. However, it is generally defined as an active process through which students are encouraged to develop a rigorous, creative and questioning style as learners, and to take an increasing responsibility for their own learning. (See also the Cornwall College Group Teaching, Training and Learning Strategy)

In order to provide learning experiences which enable students to reach their potential, to acquire subject knowledge and appropriate professional skills and to develop as capable and adaptable graduates who are independent and rational thinkers, have employment and life skills, are sensitive to environmental and social needs, can work collaboratively and who are equipped for lifelong learning, we will:

* Ensure the quality of the student experience is excellent, with no difference between those indirectly or directly funded.
* Move towards more enquiry- based curricula and associated pedagogies.
* Design curricula which enthuse learners, are inclusive, creative, stimulating, current relevant and embed cultural diversity and awareness.
* Ensure that all programmes develop employment and lifelong-learning skills and attributes alongside academic and subject specific skills.
* Embed enterprise skills and attitudes throughout the HE provision.
* Work with employers and employer groups to design and deliver increasing opportunities for high quality, work-based learning and skills acquisition.
* Develop and implement assessment strategies and policies that improve the learning experience as well as providing valid, reliable, inclusive and fair evaluation of student attainment.
* Integrate assessment into the learning process where appropriate.
* Provide clear, accurate and consistent information regarding assessment timing, tasks and procedures.
* Provide timely, clear and constructive feedback to students in a way that facilitates improvement.
* Develop and utilise appropriate blended learning techniques.
* Further develop and implement systems of student pastoral support and guidance which enhance the student learning experience and help retention.
* Continue to provide a system of disability assessment and appropriate response to the needs of disabled students.
* Continue and further develop the provision of academic support both in terms of staff activity and library and other learning resources.
* Plan, develop and maintain the physical environment and infrastructure with sufficient flexibility to meet the changing needs of students and staff.

**Recruitment and Widening Participation**

A sustained period of growth has led to the Cornwall College Group being one of the largest HE providers in the FE sector. There is a strategy for growth to at least 2000 FTE over the next five years, made possible by maintaining numbers with Plymouth and having secured additional growth numbers through the competitive bidding process with HEFCE. Demand will be further stimulated through improved internal progression, improved retention, a better recruitment process, new programmes in popular subject areas, increases in HE short courses/CPD and accreditation of in house training. In addition, the strategy for the development of further full Honours degrees will be continued where appropriate, and will lead to further growth and student retention.

The background of the great majority of our learners means that they qualify as widening participation students. Consequently, widening participation is central to our mission and implicit in everything we do in HE, and our recruitment effort is largely aimed at that target population, both in terms of young people and more mature individuals who may well be in work. However, take up of HE in Cornwall is still low, and we have to increase our efforts to widen participation further. Notwithstanding the general recruitment effort, we have and will continue to have activities specifically aimed at increasing awareness and participation in HE for those who come into the widening participation category. To this end, we will continue to be active in broad widening participation activity and to work with schools and through business to reach those from disadvantaged backgrounds. In order to achieve sustained growth and widening participation, we will:

* With the funding changes leading to fee increases and tuition fee loans, we will ensure that the bursary package on offer supports all student groups fairly.
* Communicate with our customers in clear and appropriate language.
* Continually review our HE marketing strategy against KPIs.
* Develop and utilise systems for market intelligence.
* Continue to increase internal progression.
* Increase our interaction with schools.
* Continue the hitherto excellent utilisation of student ambassadors.
* Increase our interaction with business through flexible and part time HE.
* Develop the programme portfolio in order to attract out of county students as well as improve local recruitment.
* Develop residential accommodation where appropriate.
* Work with Plymouth University and other colleges in the partnership in order to explore and develop a joint position in the overseas market.
* Exploit the County’s natural resources and appeal, and the College’s expertise and reputation in areas such as agriculture, food and marine sports, in order to develop an overseas market.
* Continue to improve progression from Advanced apprenticeships, and develop Higher level apprenticeships.

**Aim 2: Curriculum & Quality**

**Quality**

Quality is the essential underpinning of all aspects of the HE Strategy, and it is an intrinsic part of all other sections of this document. As a general statement, it is essential that we have comfort in high standards of measured quality and quality compliance and enhancement. This is not only necessary as part of our drive to provide the best experience possible for our learners, but also to meet the challenges of external scrutiny from the Quality Assurance Agency. One prerequisite for achieving this is to ensure that the HE Strategy regarding quality articulates well with the Corporate Quality Strategy embodied in the Teaching, Training and Learning Strategy. The realisation of learning and the detail of quality evaluation and enhancement in HE and FE may be nuanced differently, but it is important to recognise that the fundamental underpinnings of learning and teaching are the same whether it takes place in FE or HE, and therefore, the underpinning quality requirements are the same.

Although the HE quality strategy has to mesh with that of awarding bodies, it is important that the Corporation has robust HE quality policies and procedures that have independent validity and reliability.

In order to demonstrably achieve high quality HE provision we will:

* Ensure that Corporate HE procedures and strategies are consonant with other quality procedures and strategies in the Corporation.
* Improve key performance indicators (KPI) related to retention, progression, achievement and student and employer perceptions to a high level through annual setting and monitoring of KPIs and sampling of student and business opinion.
* Ensure that Group HE quality procedures will be consonant with those required by awarding HEIs as well as fulfilling stringent, Group quality requirements.
* Ensure that the Group is fully prepared for external review.
* Provide formal and informal means for the views of students and their representatives to be heard and to play an important part in evaluation and enhancement of HE provision. Student engagement is a key component of the QAA Higher Education Review method.
* Implement quality assurance procedures which have developmental aspects, allowing enhancement as well as comfort.
* Produce internal development and approval process which are more rigorous but quicker in order to respond to market need.
* Ensure that the quality of learning and assessment is subject to external verification.
* Audit compliance with quality procedures and requirements.
* Carry out in depth reviews and provide appropriate staff development for areas of poor performance.
* Provide staff training and awareness-raising concerning quality issues.
* Provide ways in which dissemination of good practice is facilitated.
* Make responsibility for quality as close to the point of delivery as possible with a clear upward chain of responsibility.
* Encourage appropriate staff to become external examiners and reviewers.

**Curriculum**

The HE programme portfolio developed in a period of rapid expansion of HE provision in the Group and was driven by a mix of meeting perceived market need and supply side enthusiasm. A programme of rationalisation has been in place for two years, and continues, with resulting efficiency in programme delivery and administration whilst retaining overall student numbers. There remain some gaps in nationally popular subjects and some development opportunities remain. These are being discussed with Plymouth University.

Similarly, there are gaps in the geography of our HE provision with little HE at Saltash or St Austell. We aim to make HE available to these areas, but it is important that this provision is in a form that takes into account location and draws on provision elsewhere within the Group. This is another driver for a Group-wide view of HE that will allow us to utilise resources and design provision in a more flexible way to meet the needs of these areas.

Without losing local, entrepreneurial input, there is a need to continue to rationalise and reduce the current portfolio and drive development strategically on a coordinated, Group-wide basis. We will build on current HE strengths, map HE provision more closely with FE strength and develop nationally popular subjects. The development of the Corporate Curriculum Leads (CCLs) with a brief covering further and higher education will further assist in this objective. The Corporation has an invaluable resource in reaching out to business through the considerable activities and relationships of Cornwall College Business (CCB) and the Rural Business School (RBS). Consequently, it is in a position of relative strength with regard to provision of HE short courses for continuing professional development (CPD) and the incorporation of businesses’ within-house training. However, this position of strength needs to be exploited with vigour in order to maximise our potential to deliver the Government agenda on the need for an increase in higher level skills, up-skilling the workforce and producing graduates ready to make a positive impact on business.

In order to produce a sustainable, focused and responsive portfolio of programmes, we will:

* Review the portfolio annually, rationalising where appropriate on the grounds of market potential, strategic fit and economic viability.
* Integrate and rationalise subject areas and provision on a cross-corporate basis.
* Deliver and develop programmes driven by cross-corporate market, geographic and demographic need and based on market intelligence.
* Increase HE provision in Saltash and St Austell.
* Provide clear internal progression routes from FE to HE.
* Ensure that programmes will have average module sizes consistent with financial stability and a good educational experience.
* Develop current HE and FE strengths.
* Develop in appropriate, nationally popular areas which will increase out of county recruitment and help retain learners who would otherwise leave.
* Develop further Honours Level provision in partnership with Plymouth University, in order to provide progression opportunities in areas of speciality, or where there is demonstrable social need for such local progression.
* Increase HE flexible and part time provision, utilising the activities of CCB and RBS.
* Increase accreditation of HE level, employer training, utilising the activities of CCB and RBS.
* Provide stepping on and off points within programmes.
* Wherever possible build in professional recognition and accreditation of awards into programmes.

**Aim 3: Working with Employers**

Through the Rural Business School and Cornwall College Business the Group has developed excellent relationships with employers across the whole South West region. This relationship includes, *inter alia*, providing HE level education for employees, through full programmes or degree level short courses, as well as student visits, work based learning opportunities, student – business joint projects and guest lectures.

Helping HE students to be successful in employment is fundamental to the Group’s approach to learning and teaching, and this includes learning based in, or related to, work. Teaching teams work closely with employers, talking with them regularly, involving them in the life of the Group and finding good ways they can add to learning In addition, students gain first-hand experience of work, preparing them for employment and giving them the skills, knowledge and values they will need at work, whilst on programmes and in the future.

HE staff ensure all Foundation degree students undertake suitable work based learning and undertake the related documentary requirements and assessment, **maintain contact with their industry sector, utilise a range of methods to encourage students to learn through, about and for work, and incorporate work-based and work-related learning, as appropriate, into assessment, including the linkage between theory and practice. HE programmes other than Foundation degrees also** include work based and work related learning as appropriate, including reflection on students’ own practice and linkage of theory to practice.

Further strategic development will include:

* The development of flexible, blended and part time opportunities in higher education for employee development, including Higher-level apprenticeships where appropriate.
* Reviewing the financial model of flexible and part time HE, following the withdrawal of public funding and subsequent introduction of tuition fee loans.

**Aim 4: Collaborations and Partnerships**

The Group has one main validating Higher Education Institution (HEI), Plymouth University. This partnership covers all undergraduate provision and a ResM ‘node’ in Biological Sciences, situated and managed at Duchy College. There is also one Masters Programme validated through Coventry University. The majority of the Corporation’s programmes are validated and quality assured through Academic Partnerships at Plymouth, but there are direct relationships with the Plymouth faculties of Health, Education and Society (BA (Hons) Social Work) and the Plymouth Business School (BA (Hons) Business Enterprise).The majority of the Corporation’s Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), special revenue (e.g., widening participation and retention funding) and HE capital funding is through Plymouth, but with an increasing direct relationship with HEFCE since the successful bid for direct numbers in 2011.

Plymouth University is also an important partner in terms of non-validation relationships. We are partners with them in bids for European Union Convergence Funding and, in collaboration with the Plymouth Local Authority, in an initiative to co-sponsor the Marine Academy Plymouth. The Corporation is a member of Combined Universities in Cornwall (CUC) and has some direct collaboration with the other member college, Truro and Penwith, and we are active members of the South West Higher Education Regional Development Agency, the Association of Colleges and the 157 Group. We also have important relationships with businesses, providing training and accrediting and contributing to their own provision.

Currently, these partnerships strengthen HE in the Group, and while they facilitate the realisation of our HE Strategy, we would wish to develop them by:

* Maintaining the primary funding and validation relationship with Plymouth University.
* Exploring the potential to move the relationship with Plymouth on to a more mature and innovative level, providing the Group with an appropriate level of academic autonomy.
* Undertaking the preliminary work prior to an application for foundation or full degree awarding powers, following the successful Plymouth University Institutional Review in 2011 and the QAA IQER process in 2012. Should such an application be successful, any utilisation of these powers will be careful and considered.
* Deepening and expanding our non-validation relationships, particularly with schools and business
* Participating in the development of county-wide embedding of enterprise in education

**Aim 5: Staff**

Staff within the Group have a wide range of valuable experience and provide a unique teaching and support resource for students. In order to fully utilise this in enhancing the student learning experience, staff need to be appropriately supported, developed and deployed.

Teaching and supporting learners in HE in an FE setting is a very demanding task. The context and mission of FEIs are not the same as those in HEIs, and this has important implications for staff that should not be ignored. For example, the nature of scholarly activity is not necessarily the same in both types of institution and nor are the demands placed on staff concerning research. However, acknowledging the demanding nature of teaching HE does not imply that it is more demanding or in some way a superior endeavour to any other form of teaching within the Group. It is different and may require different skills, but difference does not imply a hierarchy. It is important that the diversity of teaching within the Group is used as a strength, with good practice from the differing learning contexts informing teaching across the board.

Staff play a central role in enhancing the student experience. In order to optimise the positive impact of this role, we will:

* Ensure that staff teaching HE have an appropriate teaching qualification.
* Normally require staff teaching HE to have a qualification that is higher than the level at which they are teaching whilst acknowledging that there are circumstances where particular skills or experience negate this requirement.
* Ensure that sessional staff have appropriate qualifications and/or experience and have been fully briefed in the requirements of HE teaching.
* Provide appropriate development opportunities in order that staff may fulfil the above requirements.
* Wherever practicable, deploy staff such that those teaching HE should also teach FE.
* Drive staff development strategically, providing high quality, external and internal development opportunities for teaching and support staff.
* Implement the Group Research and Scholarly Activity Policy, to ensure curriculum currency and the ongoing development of staff.
* Provide training for HE management responsibilities.
* Assess performance against clear KPIs, with support given where necessary.
* Carry out teaching evaluation in line with the Group Teaching, Training and Learning Strategy.
* Support strategically driven staff research into designated areas of pedagogy.
* Encourage funded, applied research serving the needs of business.

**Aim 6: Governance and Management**

Within the context of agreed, Corporate, HE strategies and policies, the management responsibility for HE delivery is devolved to Heads of Colleges (HoCs) and then on to Corporate Curriculum Leads (CCLs) or their equivalent. It is the responsibility of the central HE team to initiate these strategies and policies, monitor their delivery, have academic oversight of their quality, approve the programmes and provide assistance and procedures in order to facilitate their delivery.

The central HE Operations Team comprises the Director of HE, the Admissions Managers, the HE Development Manager and HE Assistant Registrars. At a local level, sites with significant HE provision have Higher Education Coordinators (HECs) who provide a valuable resource for HE delivery at these sites, helping with HE organisation, quality assurance, programme and curriculum development and many other aspects of HE delivery.

The rapid expansion of HE provision, the distributed nature of its delivery and the devolved nature of its management has provided significant challenges in terms of consistency, efficacy and resourcing of this management. In order to meet these challenges, we:

* Have consistent HE management structures across sites.
* Provide training for management roles in HE.
* Utilise Cross-Corporate Curriculum Leads to provide subject coherence across sites.
* Draw module leaders from a pool of appropriate staff.
* Provide ongoing central support for HE management and development.

**HE Committee Structure and Governance**

The HE committee structure contributes to quality assurance and enhancement, is a vehicle for the student voice, assists in continued development and improvement of HE provision and provides transparent lines of governance. It also fulfils the requirements of the Corporation’s validating partners such that meetings of the appropriate committees take place in a timely fashion in order to meet their quality assurance and enhancement timetable. Academic Board has oversight of HE provision and reports through the Corporate Management Team (CMT) to the Quality and Human Resources Committee of the Board of Governors. The HE Operations Team manages the day to day workings of the HE Strategy, dealing with operational issues in a cross-corporate fashion. There are regular meetings of the wider HE Operations Team, incorporating the site HE Coordinators. Liaison with Plymouth University is facilitated by regular Academic Partnerships forums at the University, annual planning meetings, and regular administrator updates.

**Aim 7: Estates and Learning Resources**

The Group, through its HE management structure, works to ensure that Higher Education students are provided with resources appropriate to their studies. As part of the Combined Universities in Cornwall, capital spend derived from EU Objective 1 funding has been utilised to enhance student learning spaces at each site, in many cases this entailed a separate new build for HE use, for instance at Newquay, Camborne, Rosewarne and Stoke Climsland.

Beyond teaching spaces, resourcing on all Group provision is part of the annual Curriculum Review and Operational Planning process. Corporate curriculum leaders (CCLs) outline their curriculum offer for the following academic year, detailing resource requirements, including staffing. The plans are subjected to scrutiny by CMT and the Directors of Curriculum and Quality prior to sign off.

Regarding programme development, following broad internal approval, the new programme approval process for HE programmes is followed, including fit with the overall HE strategy, as well as that for sites and curriculum areas, with due consideration again given to resource requirements. When the proposed new programme has entered the University approval process, resourcing is scrutinised at each stage of approval, from planning proforma stage to approval documentation, and finally at the validation meeting.

Once programmes are approved to run and have commenced, there are a number of methods employed to continue to assure adequacy of resourcing - programme committees, the Annual Programme Monitoring (APM) and HE Self-Assessment process, and student surveys. Student Handbooks are updated annually.