

Higher Education Strategy 2015-18

1. The College's Vision for 2016 and beyond.

We will transform the lives and economic prosperity of local people by providing the opportunity to access learning delivered to the highest standards in subjects that match local growth sectors, and address skills gaps.

2. Background – Weymouth College

Weymouth College is a medium-sized general further education college serving a local population of 69,000. The college attracts students from Weymouth, Portland and surrounding areas of South Dorset for Further Education and the wider national community for our Higher Education courses.

The college enrolls around 7,000 students each year. Of these, 1500 students are 16-18 and a further 2000 are adult learners. In 2014-15 there were 2632 FE students on roll excluding full cost. Of these, 1294 students aged 16-18 were enrolled on programmes of study. The number of 19+ and *fully funded* totalled 1220. *The College enrolled 124 Higher Education students (97 full-time and 27 part-time) of which 15% had identified a disability or supporting need.*

According to the 2011 census, the proportion of residents from a minority ethnic heritage is below the national average. Students from minority ethnic heritages account for 3% of the college's student population. The proportion of pupils in Weymouth attaining five GCSEs at A* to C including English and Mathematics in 2012 was below the South West and England averages. Around 8% of Weymouth residents under the age of 18 are not in employment, education and training. Ten of the most deprived wards in England are located in Weymouth and Portland.

3. The historical development of Higher Education at Weymouth College

The higher education provision at Weymouth College has grown steadily over a number of years, driven by staff skills, availability and interest in developing higher level provision. The College's higher education offer in the past has failed to support an adequate range of progression to HE for the large number of students who successfully complete Level 3 qualifications at the college. The college has worked closely with a number of higher education providers over a number of years. In 2013/14 the College had courses in partnership with Bath University, Bournemouth University, Plymouth University and Kingston University. In 2013/14 Bournemouth University made a strategic decision to withdraw student numbers across a range of programmes. As a result, the college has developed a closer relationship with Plymouth University which is likely to grow in the future.

In 2014/15, the validation of two new programmes in partnership with Plymouth University for FdA Contemporary Photography Practice, and FdA Digital Media Production was approved for 2015 start. The college is also in the process of validating two new arts programmes, FdA Fine art, FdA Animation for film and TV for 2016 start.

The college is also planning to offer HNDs, and higher level courses in the following subject areas.

- HND in ICT;
- UAL Foundation for Media;
- Graphics and Publicity design.

Discussions regarding proposals for further programmes will take place with Plymouth University for development for September 2016 during the academic year 2014/15.

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4. Higher Education as part of the College's Curriculum Planning

The College's second strategic priority is to achieve year-on-year growth through the development and delivery of relevant, responsive and innovative education and training. Our ability to sustain and grow the College over the lifetime of this plan will largely be dependent upon:

- Our ability to deliver curriculum that is relevant to the needs of our students and the local economy;
- Our ability to be responsive and flexible in the way in which we deliver this curriculum;
- Ensuring that we do not allow our curriculum offer to become stale and that we regularly refresh what we offer and the way in we deliver what we offer.

The main driver of our curriculum planning will be the strategic alignment of our curriculum portfolio with the latest and most up to date local labour market intelligence and the priorities of our key funding agencies. Curriculum innovation is vital to our institutional survival and future growth.

The draft Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) strategic economic plan issued in January 2014 identifies priorities for development set against the sector strengths and opportunities for growth.

LEP Sector strengths:

- Advanced engineering and marine engineering;
- Creative and digital;
- Environmental goods and services;
- Financial and business services;
- Visitor economy.

LEP Opportunities for growth:

- Advanced materials;
- Digital products;
- Renewable energy;
- Connectivity and IT infrastructure (digital industries).

LEP Priorities for development have been segregated geographically into three areas: Conurbations / Bournemouth, Poole (aerospace, creative & digital, office, retail, housing, tourism)

The strategically important new business park at Bournemouth Airport has the capacity to accommodate 10,000 new jobs. This builds on some £50m of private sector finance already invested in the airport, with plans to create an aerospace centre of excellence.

The proposed infrastructure around the Port of Poole and Poole Regeneration Area, the second largest regeneration scheme on the south coast, will provide a mixture of office, retail and housing developments and create 5,000 jobs and 2,000 homes, creating 500 new jobs at the port. Supporting the creation of a marine centre will boost tourism and provide economic benefits.

Rural Dorset (IT, Creative and digital Industries and Services)

Typified by a diverse range of small and micro businesses. 81% of jobs are service related, with the main sectors for employment being health and social work, retail, education, manufacturing and accommodation and food service. The Public sector is a major employer in this area, and the activities of large estates as major employers and land managers are significant to the local economy. The rural area is host to a range of knowledge intensive, exporting businesses, often hidden within the rural setting. The scope to provide additional business and job opportunities, especially within growth sectors such as the creative industries, and engineering is dependent upon improved connectivity, especially high-speed broadband. The roll-out of enhanced broadband provision across the whole of

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Dorset will commence early in 2014, with a £30+ million investment in association with Broadband development UK and BT.

Coastal Dorset / Weymouth & Portland (Health and Social Care, Tourism, Services, Renewable energy, exporting)

Its ageing population is increasing the demand for Dorset’s rapidly growing health and social care sectors, but placing strain on its infrastructure. By 2035, only half of Dorset’s population will be of working age. Significant local businesses, including Sun seeker, TECAN, DEK, Ultra Electronics and Universal Engineering, each speak of the immediate future with measured but real optimism, and will continue to exploit the potential of overseas markets.

Revisions to awarding body specifications, introduction of new qualifications and accreditation awards and the government’s proposals for the development of a unitised and increasingly employer focussed qualifications and curriculum framework, represent both a challenge and opportunity to the College. As such we are expanding our HND provision to align with the higher apprenticeship frameworks.

Curriculum innovation will often be about building on our existing knowledge and expertise and further developing our current strengths. However, we must be willing to discard provision that is unpopular or no longer in demand, and replace it with new curriculum that is more relevant to the current needs of learners and employers. Sometimes, we will need to be prepared to engage in ‘blue sky thinking’ to influence and steer future provision rather just reacting to revealed needs. We are committed to further capital investment in equipping all our classrooms and teaching areas with state of the art learning technology, and Industry standard resources in order to allow our students to participate in and benefit from a diverse and stimulating learning experience.

Curriculum Planning Guidance:

- Working with a preferred local regional university to further develop a specialist Adult and Higher Education Centre, offering a comprehensive range of higher education, access to HE and pathway programmes developed in partnership with that local university.
- Expanding our higher education provision by further developing a range of both generic provision and niche, specialist provision. The generic provision would allow us to maximize progression from level 3 courses. The niche provision would appeal to a wider audience including adult full-cost and international students.
- We will ensure that all of the College curriculum areas develop progression maps, so that all areas of the College maintain and/or develop provision from level 1 to higher education where appropriate. This provision will have clear and transparent progression pathways.
- We will expand teacher training provision. Further developing teacher education courses and other provision appropriate to internal staff development opportunities.
- We will expand the College’s offer for international students. This will include opportunities for individual international students, often by infilling onto mainstream programmes, but also by the creation of specialist international provision e.g. University foundation programmes and pre-masters programmes which can be marketed as coherent packages to a range of international customers.
- We will also further develop the Weymouth Adventure brand and market a range of courses and programmes to schools, colleges, and universities, full-cost adult and international customers.
- We will additionally look at developing a higher education programme in outdoor adventure.
- We will further develop provision in digital media, engineering, and ICT at higher levels which corresponds to both LEP and College priorities.
- We will continue to develop ICT (SSA 6) curriculum including clear progression routes for our students which again will include provision at higher level. We will also look to develop provision for adult and full-cost as well as apprenticeships in this area.

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- We will develop provision which articulates with the Colleges strategic ambition to offer pathways in heritage skills. These pathways already exist in stonemasonry but could be developed in motor vehicle, boatbuilding and/or arts or rural crafts. We will continue to investigate the provision in a range of maritime skills including marine engineering, boatbuilding and specialist traditional maritime crafts which corresponds with our heritage agenda. Many of these pathways would be appropriate to the needs and demands of international students.
- We will continue to work with the local council and develop provision which is both employer led, and responsive to the sustainable economic growth of Dorset and supports Dorset's strategic economic plan. There are opportunities in some of the major developments proposed, some examples are below.
- Weymouth College : Development of a new advanced engineering centre upon the successful LEP bid.
- Memo project : Support the establishment of the global monument for biodiversity being developed in collaboration with international scientists and artists
- Jurassica Project : Support the establishment of Jurassica, the world's most spectacular prehistoric visitor attraction, bringing the Jurassic Coast to life
- Dorset wide-Digital Economy : Digital infrastructure improvements to support growth sectors and sites, eg Digital media and online learning.
- We will investigate and further develop other curriculum provision peripheral to hospitality and catering, but central to the effective running of a commercial enterprise. This provision could be as diverse as business and accounting/bookkeeping for the restaurant business.
- We will regularly scan and analyse the developments activities of other providers to make sure that we remain competitive in the marketplace. We will also regularly analyse key LMI information sources such as government consultation papers and LEP reports to ensure that we remain responsive to local, regional and national priorities.
- We will continue to increase our levels of use of on-line learning and assessment technologies such as the virtual learning environment (VLE) and other e-learning resources.
- Employer responsive programmes, likely to be delivered in the workplace, will require much greater use of web-enabled technologies and as such, we will plan for different ways of providing and resourcing these course programmes.
- Partnership working is already good, but over the lifetime of this plan we envisage an even greater degree of partnership working with employers to become more involved in joint delivery and accreditation arrangements with local businesses (e.g. similar to the NVQ training accredited by Sainsbury's and McDonald's).

5. National Context: Funding, Numbers & Information

The Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) has notified HEFCE of the need to make £150 million of savings from the HEFCE teaching grant. This follows the announcement on 4 June by the Chancellor of the Exchequer of a number of measures to bring down public debt in the current financial year. These included £3 billion in departmental savings, of which £450 million is attributable to BIS. The £150 million reduction to the HEFCE grant in financial year 2015-16 is consequent on this, and will affect both the 2014-15 and 2015-16 academic years. We have been warned that further changes to academic year 2015-16 grants may be required. This is because the funding available for that year is also dependent on the grant to HEFCE from Government for the 2016-17 financial year, and this is still to be announced. The Government has asked HEFCE to deliver the reductions in ways which protect as far as possible high-cost subjects (including STEM), widening participation (which is funded via the HEFCE Student Opportunity allocation), and small and specialist institutions.

The grant letter confirmed the Government's provision of a maximum of 30,000 additional student places in academic year 2014-15 for HEFCE-funded institutions. Warnings previously given about possible changes to 2015-16 grants therefore continue to apply, and we need to plan budgets for 2015-16 and beyond prudently.

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The key proposals that impact on Weymouth College were:

- moving the majority of grant income to the student loan book, allowing a HE provider to charge up to £9000 as long as certain access conditions are met. In practice Weymouth College decided to charge £6000 for full time Foundation Degrees.

The Government has asked HEFCE to ensure that higher education institutions maintain the quality of the student experience in these circumstances.

With the increase of tuition fees, the Government is aware that students need a better mechanism to make informed choices. This has resulted in the required development of Key Information Sets (KIS) for all Higher Education courses.

The KIS contains information for prospective students on:

- Fees;
- Accommodation prices;
- Student satisfaction;
- Destination and salary of previous students;
- Scheduled, independent and placements study on the course;
- Methods of assessment.

The production of the KIS is the responsibility of the higher education provider that manages the data returns, and follows specific guidelines from HEFCE, which places some additional demands on the College but supports strengthened information, advice and guidance.

6. Higher Education objectives for 2015-18

During 2015-2018 the college will:

- develop a higher education offer that includes flexible modes of delivery and different entry and exit points, which meets the needs of employers and students;
- review the higher education curriculum to ensure that it is viable and that it supports employability, social inclusion and lifelong learning priorities;
- work with employers and their representative bodies to identify their training needs, and develop a higher education curriculum offer that meets these needs and extend our delivery in the workplace;
- develop a range of Higher Apprenticeships which articulate the needs of students, parents, employers and the LEP;
- ensure progression pathways exist onto and from all its higher education provision and benefit higher education learners;
- provide first class higher education teaching, learning and support that is a model of Excellence;
- continue to investigate new relationships and partnership opportunities with higher education Awarding Bodies.

The College Higher Education Strategy 2015 -2018 (003) has been refreshed over the last year to form part of the whole College's vision for 2015 and beyond, to deliver on the strategic priority to achieve year-on-year growth through the development and delivery of relevant, responsive and innovative education and training.

As stated in this document, one of our aims is to transform the lives and economic prosperity of local people by providing the opportunity to access learning delivered to the highest standards and levels in subjects that match local growth sectors, and address skills gaps. This is very important to the growth and re-generation of Weymouth and Portland. To this end we are working with the LEP and other local stakeholders to assist in the growth of a workforce with higher qualifications, and skills.

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7. Definitions

None

8. Strategy Owner

Director of Higher Education

9. Who Will Need To Know About This Policy

- All HE staff including those who are franchised to undertake work for the College
- All HE students
- Employers with whom we work and who are in contact with the College
- External partners and stakeholders and those engaged in projects with the College

10. History

This policy was adopted and approved:

Signed: *Nigel Evans*

Date: *15 December 2015*

Nigel Evans, Interim Principal

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