Higher Education Strategy 2021-2026

1 Context and Intent

1.1 New College Durham (the College) plays a key role in delivering a wide range of higher level technical and professional qualifications to individuals and employers across the region. The College already has the power to award its own Foundation Degrees and has used this to design qualifications to meet the needs of employers. Increased competition and the impact of the demographic decline referenced within the wider College Strategy continues to make any significant growth in Higher Education difficult to achieve. Higher Education will continue to be an important part of the College's offer and aims to provide an inclusive environment for higher education that anticipates the varied needs of students and ensures all have equal access to educational opportunities. The purpose of this document is to provide a plan, which outlines and demonstrates the actions we will take in relation to the strategy for higher education.

1.2 To make sure we are aligned to the primary aim of the OfS, an essential part of the Higher Education (HE) Strategy is to ensure we provide graduates who join the workforce with skills to meet the demands of a responsive and competitive global market. As a college our aim is to provide vocational education which develops higher technical skills required of industry and employers. We will continue to provide opportunities to improve and develop the skills of our students to a high level.

1.3 In response to the Lifelong Learning Agenda and in an attempt to ensure that we provide HE which is flexible enough to allow individuals to engage and re-engage with learning throughout their life, the HE Strategy will recognise and promote the experience already acquired by potential applicants. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) will be promoted, particularly for mature students, as an alternative way of using the experience and knowledge individuals have obtained throughout their working life to gain access to HE by turning their experience into credits. It will provide a 'second chance' for mature students to return to education who may not have followed the typical route through school to HE and university or who wish to change their career.

1.4 The College will continue to work in partnership with employers to identify higher technical skills gaps whilst also ensuring we acknowledge the impact made to industry and employers because of the global pandemic.

2 Key Objectives

2.1 Our key objectives are:

- to enable students to aspire, succeed and progress through providing the highest quality HE learning opportunities in an environment which is both supportive and challenging;
- to develop an innovative, responsive, and inclusive curriculum that meets the needs of the regional economy, with all programmes designed and delivered in partnership with a range of employers and key stakeholders;
- to maintain and develop accommodation and resources to support a distinctive, high quality HE experience;
- through the continuous development of our HE curriculum, to enable students to meet current and future demands within the labour market and support our students to access opportunities to develop higher level skills which contribute to the economy;
- to continue to develop our strategic relationships with industry, employers, awarding bodies and the wider sector, enhancing our external visibility and reputation and impacting positively on the student experience;
- to grow our HE provisions and student numbers through widening participation, targeted advice and guidance and provide clear progression opportunities for young people and adults into higher education;
- to work in partnership with our students and staff, empowering them to further develop our dynamic and engaged academic community through research, scholarship, and professional practice.

2.2 The College will work with:

- Employers, professional and awarding bodies related to individual curriculum and subject areas.
- Employer Advisory Board
- Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education
- Current and prospective students
- Students' Union
- Local partner schools
- North East Collaborative Outreach Programme (NECOP)
- Mixed Economy Group (MEG)
- Association of Colleges (HE in FE)

3 Strategic Aims

3.1 Strategic Aim 1 - To ensure programme development is innovative and offers the flexibility to meet the needs of prospective students; aligned to the demands of the higher level skills required of industry and employers.

We will do this through:

- developing and expanding the HE portfolio to meet the higher-level skills needs of the economy;
- assessing the potential for degree awarding powers;
- ensuring the design and planning of programmes enables the College to offer an agile and flexible curriculum offer to meet the demands of employers and other stakeholders;
- monitoring the design and review of programmes as part of periodic review and validation processes to ensure they are fit for purpose and provide graduates with the skills to meet the needs of industry and employment;
- working with schools, internal College students, employers, and other external stakeholders to promote the HE vocational and higher-level skills offer;
- improving and promoting equality of opportunity for underrepresented groups to access, succeed in and progress from higher education through targeted projects and activities.

3.2 Strategic Aim 2 - Ensure teaching, learning and assessment strategies monitor and support students to enable them to succeed and progress into employment and further study.

We will do this through:

- further developing and maintaining robust and reliable management information systems which proactively monitor and support student engagement in learning;
- improving retention of students through targeted academic and pastoral tutorials to provide continuous support across all HE programmes;
- developing and providing targeted support mechanics for identified student groups including those from underrepresented groups;
- identifying targeted approaches to improve part-time progression to employment or further study;
- designing and delivering programmes which produce graduates with the skills and knowledge to enable progression to employment and further study.

3.3 **Strategic Aim 3 - To provide higher education which values students as co-contributors to enhancing the student experience**

We will do this through:

- enabling students to participate in activities as part of the HE experience, by providing views and opinions on the quality of their learning experience that offer an evidence base for enhancement and change;
- embedding the concept of the 'engaged student' as an important driver for quality enhancement across the institution;
- valuing students as producers of knowledge and agents of change through providing appropriate recognition and celebration of their contribution;
- providing opportunities for effective student representation in decision-making processes including on governing boards; validation process, HE committees and meetings at curriculum and programme level;
- promoting and nurturing a culture of inclusivity and belonging within an academic and social community;
- aspiring to be in the top quartile in all categories of the internal and external student surveys;
- offering a high-quality student experience through excellence in teaching and learning.

3.4 **Strategic Aim 4 - To ensure staff are provided with the opportunity to continually develop their knowledge and skills, which will enable them to make a positive contribution to the future academic direction of their discipline.**

We will do this through:

- supporting and developing staff members in utilising research and scholarly activity to deliver exceptional learning opportunities for our students;
- recognising and valuing research and scholarship undertaken by staff members, appropriate to the academic level at which they teach;
- continuing to invest in staff development and CPD to enhance and improve the skills set of our staff;
- encouraging staff to obtain recognition of their teaching, assessment, and support of HE through the Advance HE Fellowship process;
- where appropriate, supporting the membership of professional bodies;
- encouraging collaboration, communication and improved networking and sharing of practice both internal and external to the College.

3.5 **Strategic Aim 5 - To continue to enhance our work in partnership with employers to identify higher technical skills gaps, through curriculum design and the development of programmes which support life-long learning.**

We will do this through:

- strengthening existing relationships with employers, industry, professional bodies, and the wider community by engaging them in development and design of our programmes;
- meeting the needs of employers and industry by providing graduates with the skills to join an effective workforce;
- continuing to involve partners and external stakeholders in the development, delivery, and assessment of all HE programmes to enhance the student experience;
- embedding an integrated approach to our curriculum in the development and acquisition of digital technology to support a sustainable and highly skills workforce;
- development of new programmes which are designed to be flexible and offer an inclusive approach to teaching, learning and assessment;
- validation and re-approval of programmes which require curriculum teams to map their programmes to the requirements, as appropriate, of Higher Technical Qualifications, national occupational standards, and higher-level apprenticeships;
- promotion of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL);
- focusing on establishing a strong curriculum offer at level 4 and level 5 which meets the emerging demands of priority sectors;
- continuing to offer Top Up Degrees as a progression route for students with our awarding body.

3.6 **Strategic Aim 6 - Ensure the development of partnerships which align to the vision and values of the College whilst offering the opportunity to enhance and develop our HE offer**

We will do this through:

- strengthening existing relationships with current partners;
- exploring new partnerships with education providers who share the vision and values of the College.

3.7 **Strategic Aim 7 - To use our resources and accommodation effectively to support a high quality student experience**

We will do this through:

- providing accommodation and resources to support a quality learning experience;
- continued investment in facilities and resources;

- providing resources and accommodation which develops and delivers the high-level skills required of local, regional, and national economy.

4 Impact and Review

4.1 Through the College's vision over the next five years, we will review its curriculum offer. As this Strategy evolves, the curriculum will be further expanded, diversified, and tailored to be responsive to local economy, the business community and emerging growth sector areas.

4.2 The College is monitored externally through the Office for Students (OfS). The OfS's primary aim is to ensure that English higher education is delivering positive outcomes for students – past, present, and future.

4.3 The effectiveness of this Strategy will be monitored by the Corporation in accordance with the Instruments and Articles of Government of the Corporation and in line with terms of reference of sub-committees of the Corporation.

4.4 **Progress and success of the Higher Education Strategy will be measured in the following ways:**

Key Performance Indicator	Baseline 2020/21	Target 2021/22	Target 2022/23	Target 2023/24	Target 2024/25	Target 2025/26
1. Number of FT students (Durham)	489	532	568	593	630	648
2. Number of PT students (Durham)	206	233	286	331	367	389
3. Number of FT students (London)	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200
4. Total Number of HE students (FT & PT)	1895	1965	2054	2104	2197	2237
5. % of students retained (in year retention)	90%	90%	91%	92%	92%	92%
6. % of students who continue on year 2 of their programme	85%	86%	87%	88%	88%	88%
7. The number of students who progress internally from L3 to HE	107	125	135	145	150	150
8. % of students who achieve their award	90%	91%	92%	92%	92%	92%

9. Overall student satisfaction	82% *(NSS benchmark)*	90%	91%	92%	93%	93%
10. Student satisfaction in teaching on their course	85% *(NSS benchmark)*	90%	91%	92%	92%	92%
11. Student satisfaction in learning opportunities	85% *(NSS benchmark)*	90%	91%	92%	92%	92%
12. Student satisfaction in learning resources	84% *(NSS benchmark)*	88%	89%	90%	90%	90%

5. Strategy Review

5.1 The Deputy Principal will be responsible for this strategy supported by the Vice Principal of Higher Education and will report regularly to the Executive Leadership Team and Corporation. This Higher Education Strategy will be reviewed annually and revised as appropriate to inform strategic, economic, and social developments.

Implementation Date July 2021
Review Date July 2022