



## Access and Participation Plan 2019-2020

Access and widening participation are central tenets of our strategy and mission statement. Educational opportunities, as well as social justice are promoted at ICON College by the provision of high quality education enabling our students to achieve their potential and fulfill their ambitions. Our commitment to widening participation is now encompassed in our Access and Participation Plan, accompanied by an Action Plan [pp. 6-8] providing the framework within which successful access and widening participation are developed, implemented and embedded. Coordination of widening access across the College is led by the Senior Management Team (SMT) and supported by Heads of Department for their respective set of Courses.

We specifically focus on *under-represented* groups:

- Students with low socio-economic status
- Students from areas of lower higher education participation
- Students from Black and Minority Ethnic groups
- Mature Students

Our Action Plan (**see pp. 16-17**) seeks to identify specific targets and it supports our commitment to deliver an excellent student experience providing added value for the type of underprivileged students we recruit. The Plan is built on the following principles:

1. Commitment to social justice and open access for students who are socially disadvantaged and under-represented in higher education.
2. Upholding the student' learning contract.
3. Building and enhancing a culture of access across all sectors of the College.
4. Increasing participation of students with backgrounds identified by Access to Success: LSES backgrounds, young men and adult returners.
5. Building on participation in College committee and board work and continuing to build the student voice

### Under-Represented Groups

We are committed to enhancing our understanding of students' access and participation for groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 [**See: Access and Participation Statement**]. Our approach to this will be described in our Action Plan.

### Sector wide gaps

Our Action Plan is informed by data provided by the Office for Students (OfS) and other government statistics. We note the following:

- 18 year olds from low participation neighbourhoods are 2.3 times less likely to enter higher education than their most advantaged peers.
- The proportion of students from black and ethnic minority groups achieving a first or upper second-class degree is lower than their white peers.
- Full time, UK domiciled mature first degree entrants in 2015-16 were almost twice as likely to leave after one year.
- Disabled graduates are more likely to be unemployed than non-disabled graduates.

Our Action Plan, whilst not fully addressing every group focuses commitment on increasing access for mature students, ethnic minority groups and those living in low participation neighbourhoods.

## **Action Plan Template**

This Plan is submitted in accordance with the requirements placed on those in higher education that intend to charge the basic rate of tuition fee for Home/EU students commencing full time undergraduate courses in 2019-20. This agreement has been prepared in accordance with the guidance notes on Access and Participation Plans provided by the Office for Students (OfS). Furthermore, consideration by the SMT and Academic Board (with student representatives on the Academic Board) has been taken.

With regard to access, the College's admissions policy aims to ensure that students of a suitable calibre are admitted. Our admissions system is:

- Transparent
- Sound in making selection decisions related to future student success
- Able to minimize barriers for applicants
- Underpinned by appropriate College structures and processes

We now move on to complete the plan in accordance with the headings required by the OfS.

### **1. Assessment of current performance**

The College was established in 2003 to meet the demand for quality education at affordable fees and to make world-class UK university degrees more accessible via HND Courses awarded by Pearson. To satisfy this demand, the College seeks to prepare students for effective and profitable roles in their choice of careers and to offer an Educational experience which will aid them in taking their place as productive members of society at an affordable cost but with no compromise on quality. Indeed, the College prides itself in providing maximum support to ensure that all students reach their full potential.

Currently the College has five departments: the Department of Business and Management Studies; the Department of Travel, Tourism and Hospitality Management; the Department of Health and Social Care; the Department of Information Technology; the Department of Engineering. The last two departments are contained in the Faculty of Information Technology and Engineering. The College has 1060 students. Of that there are 520 students in the Business Course, 225 in Health and Social Care, 87 students in Computing and System Development, 152 students in Travel and Tourism and 76 students in Hospitality Management and 0 students in Electrical and Electronic Engineering.

The College occupies a substantial part of a building along one side of Adler Street, E1. The College operates from the premises on the edge of the City of London, on the route to Canary Wharf, and in the neighbourhood of a large South Asian community. The building is a converted industrial site with D1 permission. The College premises have been adapted for educational purposes to include lecture rooms, computer laboratories, and student welfare and refectory services, together with associated administration offices. The College is close to the Whitechapel Art Gallery and the restaurants of Brick Lane, with transport links to all parts of London, by bus, underground and over ground railways.

The College is committed to expanding access to higher education to individuals from those sections of the community historically and currently under-represented in the Higher Education sector. These groups are:

- Students from areas of low education participation, low household income and/or socioeconomic status
- Students of particular ethnicities
- Mature students
- Black and Minority Ethnic Communities (BME)

This commitment to widening participation is reflected in the demography of our student body. The College is proud of the fact that 98% of students are mature, many having been out of education for a considerable period of time. Whilst it is recognised that this cohort of students is challenging in terms of retention and achievement, the College has decided to continue to offer and indeed increase provision to these communities with enhanced systems to support them. For example, it is noteworthy we offer access to a Hardship Fund for students experiencing financial difficulties.

The College received centre approval to offer Pearson (HND provisions) Courses and has chosen to work with that single awarding organisation (Pearson) since 2004 for all of the Courses it offers. Whilst some alternative providers applied for franchise and validation arrangements with an accrediting university, we always believed that the costing model for university franchise was not attractive and we would need to expand our academic resources to deliver a validation model. Our strategy continued with consolidating our HND Courses with Pearson. With the offer of validation from the OfS, the independent body offering TDAP, this view has now changed.

The curriculum of our courses is determined by Pearson who provides programme specifications from which the College is permitted some choice of units to develop a curriculum to suit local needs. Working with a single awarding body has brought benefits of stability in managing academic standards. The College has benefitted from Pearson's external quality assurance processes that monitored our academic performance. Pearson has enhanced these since the QAA review (2013) to include an Academic Management Review (AMR) in addition to the customary annual External Examiner (EE) visit/reports. The AMR focuses on the overarching management of Pearson programmes by the College. The College has received positive reports from both the AMR and EE reports advising that the College has met all Pearson requirements since the QAA review. They have imposed no requirements on the College and where recommendations have been made, the College has welcomed these and used them to enhance its provision. However, as time has progressed we have taken more responsibility towards self-evaluation whilst accepting the ultimate academic authority was Pearson. We continue to develop and build robust internal quality mechanisms.

The curriculum offered by the College has been designed to prepare students to cope with changing employment opportunities to present both theoretical and practical approaches to the diverse needs of the ever-changing global economy. In support of this goal, the College has a highly qualified and experienced teaching staff recruited from appropriate academic disciplines and from the professional community, on the basis of their knowledge, teaching skills and practical experience.

Since 2003 the College has not only been subject to external review by Pearson but also had to apply regulations from a range of external stakeholders including the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), HEFCE and HESA. The College has received reports commenting favourably on the quality of provision, and the strong support services in place to enhance the student learning experience. Furthermore, there is little doubt when taking into account outcomes from all the external regulatory agencies that our performance has been enhanced.

However, the College has had some key challenges that we continuously address enabling us to improve current performance thereby adding value to the student experience.

#### *QAA Higher Education Review 2016-17*

We successfully achieved each benchmark in the recent QAA Review, bar one. We felt we were unfortunate to get a '*requires improvement*' in the Quality of Learning Opportunities. We received '*not met*' for B6 and B10 with the level of risk being cited '*moderate*'. The key issues were how we internally verified and made transparent assessment outcomes (B6) and how we managed work placements (B10). However, we accepted the outcome and we addressed both these issues in depth. The exposition of actions we have taken to rectify these matters are contained in the Self Evaluation Document (SED July 2018). The QAA held a Partial Review of the College with respect to Quality Code B in July 2018 and it is anticipated outcomes will be in the public domain by September 2018, after this document is submitted.

We were pleased to hear on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2018 following the Partial Review that the QAA confirmed that the quality of student learning opportunities **meets UK expectations**. They confirmed that the letter sent to us is also copied to the Office for Students. In this respect, the QAA are now satisfied with all benchmarks required to pass HERA at ICON College.

#### *Student attendance*

Monitoring student attendance has been an issue in the past but is now monitored by fingerprint technology and absences chased by a dedicated Student Attendance, Monitoring and Reporting section. This has resulted in an improvement in attendance and retention which now stands at an average of 80% for attendance and 90% for retention. In terms of achievement, completion and certification within the normal 2 years of the Course, has now risen to 72% However, the College continues to be faced with the challenge of students fully completing the Courses within the two years SLC funding, although the position continues to improve, and where appropriate, the College continues to provide additional academic support to help students to complete the Course. Where permitted by SLC, a student may extend the course beyond 2 years. The College will support them in this but only if they have achieved acceptable attendance and attainment, and the College feels confident that the student is committed to completing the Course.

#### *Additional challenges*

We seek to improve the overall response rate for the National Student Survey (NSS). The difficulty has been to encourage students to engage with the process. However, in 2017-18 the response rate to the NSS was 75.7% which exceeded the national average response

rate of 70.3%. In order to achieve this outcome, the College put up posters and flyers in the common room and sent emails and texts to students at intervals. Also, informal conversations with individual students stressed the importance of the NSS. Tutors also encouraged participation at poignant moments in the term. At present, we provided a small incentive to help improve the response rate. Overall, we are keen to get across to students that their concern for 'value-for-money' is partially addressed by reliable and valid data from the NSS.

Another key challenge has been improving the overall response rate for the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. However in 2017-18 the College was pleased to exceed the national benchmark with a return of 86.5% completed questionnaires. Furthermore, the uncertainty around the impact of the UK leaving the European Union (EU) could potentially have a detrimental effect on our performance. At present, the College recruited 77% of its student body from the EU and reports in the media seem to be suggesting a fall off of EU applicants to study in the UK. There is increasing anxiety around the future status of EU nationals and rules regarding student loans for them. We anticipate this is likely to have an impact on our recruitment. Without the necessary intervention we predict there may be a shortfall of students coming from the EU and we need to reflect on the College Strategy to address this.

## ***2. Ambitions and Strategy***

Based on the preceding analysis of its current performance, opportunities exist for ICON College to improve access and participation for a number of groups within the market. In the first place, the market was defined on the basis of the Higher National Diploma, and for the 2017/18 academic years it became clear that this has the potential to feed into degree programmes, which are being introduced to promote progression of the College's HND graduates into higher education.

Our key strategic ambitions, albeit not exhaustive over the next five years are:

- To become a key provider of education to all student groups including those in and out of work.
- To acquire taught degree awarding powers to ensure internal student progression and College sustainability.
- To attain university college title and ultimately university title.

Taking the above ambitions into account we have identified seven key objectives that inform the Access and Participation Plan in general, and the Action Plan, in particular.

## **ICON College's key objectives**

We have 7 key objectives coming out of our strategic ambitions that we wish to meet over the next five to ten years in order to achieve our strategy and further promote access and participation. At present they are in no particular order or priority.

**Objective 1:** To attain taught degree awarding powers and ultimately university title

**Objective 2:** To focus on the locality, based on demographic evidence of population increase in the postcode catchment areas

**Objective 3:** To ensure the College is equipped to recruit more disabled students to reflect trends within the local boroughs, in London and UK Higher Education Sector

**Objective 4:** To offer student led workshops for the local community to encourage working in partnership in areas such as diabetes awareness, food hygiene etc.

**Objective 5:** To be a key contributor to increased employability in the locality through the provision of first-class education.

**Objective 6:** To increase the intake of as many disadvantaged groups as possible congruent with the migrant population in the locality.

**Objective 7:** To broaden marketing and recruitment to encompass Greater London and the South East and also international markets

We provide an Action Plan identifying actions, strategies and target dates showing how we intend to deliver our Access and Participation Plan.

### **ACTION PLAN**

**Objective 1:** To attain taught degree awarding powers and ultimately university title

**Action:** Begin the process as soon as is feasibly possible

**Strategy:** Establish a collegiate community through contractual changes

**Target date:** After January 2019 to start process

**Objective 2:** To focus on the locality, based on demographic evidence of population increase in the postcode catchment areas

**Action:** Continue to develop opportunities for knowledge and skills improvement and focus on emerging strategies to support those with English as a second language

**Strategy:** Encourage more employer involvement in curriculum development, guest speakers from appropriate industries and members of an in-college forum

**Target Date:** Embedded by July 2020

**Objective 3:** To ensure the College is equipped to recruit more disabled students to reflect trends within the local boroughs, in London and UK Higher Education Sector

**Action:** Ensure that the College offers physical and academic resources enabling disabled students to enjoy full access and participation

**Strategy:** Effectively market College programmes engendering inclusivity and ensure staff development delivers an understanding of curriculum support for disabled students

**Target Date:** July 2021

**Objective 4:** To offer student led workshops for the local community to encouraging wider access and participation in areas such as diabetes awareness, food hygiene etc.

**Action:** Ensure workshops for each course on offer has the opportunity for a student led workshop

**Strategy:** Identify appropriate workshops in consultation with student representatives

**Target Date:** July 2020

**Objective 5:** To be a key contributor to increased employment in the locality through the provision of first-class education.

**Action:** To undertake a full review of College provision to see levels of student access and participation on each course as well as undertaking a full academic review

**Strategy:** To set up academic panels of reviewers with internal and external membership

**Target Date:** September 2020

**Objective 6:** To increase the intake of as many disadvantaged groups as possible congruent with the migrant population in the locality.

**Action:** Market the College through all media channels as an institution that welcomes access for all under-represented and disadvantaged minorities and provides full student participation

**Strategy:** Establish contacts with community leaders, charities, employers, local authorities and any other organisations that engage regularly with disadvantaged groups

**Target Date:** On-going

**Objective 7:** To broaden marketing and recruitment to encompass Greater London and the South East and also international markets

**Action:** Review the current marketing strategy, plan and culture to implement a marketing plan that broadens the College intake

**Strategy:** Produce a marketing strategy and plan that fully focuses on widening participation and student access both locally and internationally

**Target Date:** September 2019

### **Summary of ambitions**

The College continues to provide an opportunity for quality higher education for aspiring and willing students in London and around, irrespective of their status, at an affordable price. The College also aims to reach out to the disadvantaged group of students from all categories. It is also committed to diversity and equality in students and staff recruitment. Today, the majority of our students come from areas of low education participation, low household income and/or socioeconomic status with a fair distribution of students from both genders representing all age groups. The gender breakdown of our students is 60.7% female and 39.3% male. The ethnic breakdown of students is 18.7% Black/Black British African, 9.2% Asian/Asian British Other, 71.3% White-Other and 0.8% Other Ethnic Group. 16 students have had disability facilities provided.

The College is in the process of registering with the Office for Students (OfS) to seek validation and to develop a partnership leading to Taught Degree Awarding Powers (TDAP). The College recognises the need to build an infrastructure capable of achieving this long-term aim. The College's Strategic Plan assumes a period of five years taking a staged approach. Thus post registration with OfS the College anticipates taking forward one or more programmes as Top Ups rather than a full BA validation. The first stage is seeking validation of one or more programmes enabling the College to deliver degree level study. In the first instance, this is likely to be the validation of a BA Level 6 top up for Business and Management Studies, followed by other top ups.

Following successful validation of a suite of Top Ups the College will seek to validate its own undergraduate courses from Level 4 to Level 6. This will require the recruitment of heads of department to lead the developments. Internally it is likely we will require a Course Review Team (CRT) to set criteria for approval of any new course going forward.

It is anticipated that through successful validation and over a period of delivery time, as trust builds, increasing levels of delegated authority will move towards the College. As the College gains experience of delivering its own courses supported by sound academic management underpinned by complementary academic structures and quality framework, at this juncture it will consider submitting an application for TDAP. The College recognises the need to have a comprehensive and targeted plan to achieve this goal.

The College has applied to deliver the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) at a high standard to better inform students' choices about what and where to study; raise esteem for teaching; recognising and rewarding excellent teaching; better meeting the needs of employers, business, industry and the professions; enhance the management of resources

efficiently and effectively and develop internal quality measures which mirror national metrics and provide the information needed for academic and administrative staff to measure performance. Success at achieving TEF was marred by the HERAP 2017 outcome where we received a 'requires improvement' in the quality of learning opportunities (QLO). This was turned around at the QAA Partial Review in July 2018 and we are hoping we can now be TEF approved.

Another priority is the consideration of the College owning its own premises with a modern facility that can be accessed by all of our students and offer greater security and convenience to the students and staff.

### 3. Targets

ICON College sets its targets based on an analysis of current statistics and trends. We provide tables accompanied by critical analysis and interpretation to identify our future planned targets which will support effective student access and participation.

#### Statistics

ICON College recognises the importance of gathering statistics to inform its practice in higher education. We are also aware that in the near future the OfS has made it clear of the importance of data gathering. In this respect we acknowledge that we need to work on our data gathering capabilities and our ability to qualitatively analyse and interpret the information. This helps us to identify actions to go into our Access and Participation Plan. The production of an Access and Participation Plan not only enhances our thinking on how we can improve access and participation for students but also encourages us to reflect on our own data in more detail in this area.

At present we have two key data instruments to inform our thinking. These are

- a) Data identifying the recruitment areas that have had major impact on our student number (**Reflecting on Access**) and
- b) Data from the National Student Survey (NSS) providing in depth student feedback on our performance (**Reflecting on Participation**).

#### a) Table 1: ICON College Recruitment Data from 2013/14 to 2017-18

Student Intake for Academic Year	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
% of Students from EU	51.5	55.2	52.3	59.0	77.3
% of Students from UK	48.5	44.8	47.7	41.0	22.7
% of Students from Post Code E	28.6	27.5	24.0	23.0	30.8
% of Students from Post Code W	1.3	1.7	1.1	0.8	0.9
% of Students from Post Code N & NW	12.9	11.8	12.5	12.6	8.9
% of Students from Post Code SE & SW	26.7	25.9	27.7	26.4	12.4
% of Students from Greater and Outside London	30.5	33.1	34.7	37.2	47.0

Table 1 provides an analysis of the percentage of the number of students recruited onto ICON College's HND courses from the EU and the UK and utilising postcodes from the students' residential addresses over the five year period 2013/14 to 2017-18.

Drilling down, the statistics show that in 2013/14, the College's first year of teaching SLC funded students there was nearly an equal distribution between EU students (51.5% compared to 48.5% from UK) on the HND courses. Through the following years 2014-15 to 2017-2018 the number of EU students have grown as an overall percentage of the College intake and by 2017-18 had risen to 77.3%. At the same time from 2013-14 to 2017-18 the percentage of UK students has fallen from 48.5% in 2013-14 to 22.7% in 2017-18. This is potentially a concern. At present, our EU figures are strong. However, higher education is likely over the coming years to experience a drop in students coming from the EU to study in the UK. Thus, strategically we are looking to redefine our market in order to increase the number of UK students admitted onto the programme, initially targeting students in the local catchment areas and then looking to broaden our markets both nationally and internationally.

There has been a population growth in the locality. It is noteworthy that Tower Hamlets had seen a growth in its population of around 35% in the last ten years. However, it was a little disconcerting that in the last three years we experienced a 5.6% reduction in students recruited from Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Newham (Postcode E). It is probable that this was due to the continuous intensive competition in the area, demonstrable by the number of universities accrediting with private providers in London (e.g. University of Bedford and London College of Commerce) and also opening their own offices in London e.g. (Coventry; Sunderland etc.) Of course, opportunities for TDAP offers a more level playing field for alternative providers like ICON College.

However it is noteworthy that in the last year (2017-18) possibly through improved marketing, we experienced a reverse in the trend and we were able to recruit 30.8% of our students coming from postcode E. This showed a 7% increase from the previous year and one of our key strategies is to build on this.

Suffice it to say, our 2017-18 data from postcodes N and NW and SE and SW are causing a little concern. Postcode N and NW shows a reduction in our total student intake from 12.6% in 2016-17 to 8.9% in 2017-18. Furthermore, the data from postcode SE shows a fall in total student intake from 26.4% in 2016-17 to 12.4% in 2017-18. This represents a substantial decrease in student intake from an area that provided over 25% of our student body. We are looking at ways of how we can reverse this, as a more defined focus on our local markets is crucial along with a strategy that will seek to build a stronger national and international student body.

It is also notable that there is a significant emergent trend relevant to the College and that is the growth in the last three years of students enrolling at ICON from Greater London and further afield in the UK (30.5% in 2013-14 rising annually to 37.2% in 2016-17 and 47% in 2017-18). This constitutes very positive news that ICON is becoming attractive to students outside our main local catchment areas and suggests our marketing efforts are paying dividends. This outcome is welcomed as we reflect on the attainment of TDAP by which time we would hope to be well known nationally.

Currently, the SMT is reviewing our marketing strategy based on the aforementioned evidence. It is essential we are proactive in identifying emerging markets. We intend to continue to focus locally on Tower Hamlets, Hackney and Newham as well as maintaining a solid marketing presence in postcode SE and SW including Lewisham and Greenwich. Furthermore, we are reflecting on how we can more effectively promote the College outside of London for market benefit.

## b) Results from the National Student Survey for ICON College 2017-18

The College is responsible for developing, implementing and facilitating arrangements and processes that ensures the engagement of students. The QAA Review team in the HER (AP) 2017 visit saw this as a good practice *“The comprehensive and systematic representation structure which empowers students to contribute to the development and enhancement of their educational experience.”*

The way we have developed our approach to student engagement is crucial to the effectiveness of student participation in the College.

The College embraces the notion of working with its students in a mutually beneficial way and is proud of forming a dynamic ‘partnership’ and provides opportunities by which students can both contribute to quality assurance and on-going enhancements in the student experience and shape their learning experience. Student feedback forms a crucial element of the quality assurance and enhancement processes.

The College takes deliberate steps to engage its students, individually and collectively, as partners in the quality assurance and enhancement of their educational experience for current and future cohorts. Student engagement is facilitated mainly through the various deliberative committees that the student representatives are elected to and in providing feedback via questionnaires and surveys. Of particular significance is the positive feedback we have received from the **National Student Survey**.

The College received a satisfactory set of results from the National Student Survey. This clearly endorses the ‘good practice’ received in the HERAP 2017 and provides validity and reliability of students’ perception on the quality of the College and its commitment to learning and teaching. It provides clear evidence that in these areas, in most cases, student opportunity for access and participation is positive. However, we accept that improvements can always be made.

On completion of the survey the student response rate was 75.7% which was 5.4% above the national response rate. The data gives a clear indication on where we did well (+90%), satisfactory (+80%) and where we could improve (+70%). It was satisfying that no result was below 70% and for HND L5 Travel and Tourism Management we received 100% for *teaching on the course; staff good at explaining things; making the subject interesting; intellectually stimulating and challenging*. Across all our programmes of study, none of these areas fell below 80% and we can pick out HND L5 in Computing and Systems Development as the one programme that scored between 80 and 85% in this area. All others scored 90% or more. In this respect when reflecting on positive access to the programme, the **quality of teaching and staff input** has scored highly and on the whole above 90%. Overall the student perception of quality of teaching on the course averages above 90%.

The college does equally well on the provision of **learning opportunities** with no mark below 80% (the College standard for satisfactory) and many above 90% and again HND L5 Travel and Tourism Management the most satisfied constantly scoring above 95% and awarding 100% for the *provision of opportunities to bring information and ideas together from different topics*. Overall the College can be satisfied with its delivery of learning opportunities with an average of just over 90%.

**Assessment and Feedback** scores over 80% in most categories with many at 90%. However, BTEC HND L5 Business and L5 Computing and Systems Development scored 74% and 70% respectively for the *fairness of marking and assessment*. These are areas that the College has investigated and provided suitable intervention as these results fall below the national average. Suffice it to say there are a number of reasons why this has occurred but it correlates with the HERAP outcomes in 2017. Notwithstanding this concern the HERAP Partial Review concluded that the College’s approach to assessment was now up to

standard. It remains to be seen what the NSS 2018-19 results will be. It is noteworthy that HND L5 in Hospitality Management and Travel and Tourism Management scored between 90% and 100% in all NSS benchmarks for assessment with HND L5 Health and Social Care recording satisfactory or above scores between 83% and 91%. Overall, the quality of **assessment and feedback** on the courses scores 89%.

Overall the quality of **academic support** averages 86% across all the programmes which is satisfactory and at least 80% or more is scored in most categories. However HND L5 in Computing and Systems Development scores a bare 80% for *being able to contact staff* and HND Level 5 in Hospitality Management only 75%. The College intends to keep this under review, as the ability of students to contact staff is crucial for access to the courses.

**Organisation and management** scores between 80% and up to 95%, in most areas. However, for two L5 programmes the *timetable works for me* scores only 80% and 75% respectively. We believe we need to focus on this matter with student representatives. On the whole the results for organisation and management are satisfactory.

The area of **Learning Resources** appears to be the area we need to apply solid intervention in our Access and Participation Plan. Whilst the overall average score is 82%, 40% of the courses scored 76.74 and 75% for the overall quality of learning resources. However, one HND group scored 75% for the *provision of IT resources supporting the student's learning*. Two HND groups out of 5 (40%) scored 75% and 71% respectively for *library resources*. Of major concern is that 3 HND groups out of 5 (60%) scored 79%, 76.56% and 75% respectively for *access to specific course materials*. Overall, we must keep this information under review.

Finally, feedback on the **Student Voice** was on the whole good with an average overall rate of 86%. It is notable that the width between the highest and lowest response was over 15% (96.97% and 81.40%). However, there is a viable system of student representation that has always been positively reviewed by QAA HERAP and prior to that REO.

### **Planned areas requiring effective monitoring and/or to improve student access as part of our Access and Participation Plan emanating from our data.**

The Academic Board and/or SMT needs to ensure that there is:

- a) Continuous review of partially new assessment procedures introduced as a result of HERAP 2017 and Partial review 2018.
- b) Timely institutional input to improve resources, where required.
- c) Continuous monitoring of the quality of academic support across all courses
- d) An action plan to identify how learning resources are to be improved by the Teaching, Learning and Resources Committee (TLRC).
- e) Monitoring on the way student feedback is acted upon.
- f) Continuity in building of good practice for the student representation system.

In summation, the NSS data has identified a number of areas when acted upon would contribute to improved student access and participation and to our Access and Participation Plan. These are identified above. However, there is a pleasing level of *overall satisfaction* across the board with respective figures of 100%; 92%; 91%; 90% and only one below this at 85% giving an overall average of 91.60%. This is a figure the College can celebrate.

#### **4. Access success and progression measures**

##### *Assuring effective retention and progression*

We are aware that a solid approach to access and participation will improve both retention and progression. The College recruits most students from the locality as stated previously and as such we continue to look for ways to improve access to higher education and the value of obtaining qualifications. The College is aware that for most people in the community it is the key way to offer socio-mobility to underprivileged people. We are committed to making learning accessible for anyone wishing to take advantage of it, if they meet the entry criteria. Currently, we track learning and progression and this is monitored annually.

The majority of students we recruit are mature students. Some are part-time and many have significant life responsibilities, such as family commitments and parental responsibility. We believe that such students achieving an HND even if they go no further is a solid achievement. However, improving retention is consistently an issue and we are always seeking ideas to address this. We continue to offer one-to-one tutorials and additional language support as a means to achieving better retention and progression rates. Our welfare office delivers planned interventions, where possible, to deal with problems as they arise at certain points through a module. Interventions can be aimed at cohorts known to perform poorly in the past and one to one interventions occur when deemed appropriate.

The College will continue working closely with data produced from HESA, DLHE and NSS data to keep in check student profiles, destination of leavers and student feedback as a part of its enhancement strategy. This will highlight any potential opportunities to improve access and participation.

The College will continue to make its students a key part of its decision-making processes in order to utilise their experience in the local areas. Involvement of students has proved effective in maintaining high retention levels and a greater feeling of belonging. In this way, students tend to influence friends and relatives to come onto the course and secondly, through the establishment of further friendships, to stay on the course.

Major adjustments were introduced in 2015, which saw class sizes reduced, improving student access to staff and participation in class. More and key structural aspects of the current learning and teaching strategy will be developed to reflect the changing profile of the student and to support the needs of the diverse student population. These will include flexible timetabling and improving retention through the development of a sense of belonging among peers with similar backgrounds.

The College is keen to promote learning and teaching strategies that will maximise student performance and access. This will be achieved through a dynamic approach to learning that will offer students a range of knowledge and skills development on the programmes and reinforced by and evaluated through, a managed system of work placements, where appropriate. College policy seeks to offer work-integrative classroom learning. When available, employers are effectively utilised to enhance the student experience and therefore our retention and progression rates.

At the same time the College is keen through its learning policy to promote emerging student responsibilities for their own learning gleaned from a wide range of learning methods. The Learning and Teaching Policy seeks to empower the student to act independently and to achieve a greater self-awareness and responsibility. The College also acknowledges that

individual students have differing preferred styles of learning and assessment and in this respect it will seek to meet every student's needs through diverse learning methodologies.

The College will continue to operate a student retention policy that is tied to the constant evaluation of the risk of students to drop out. This will continue to be closely related to student engagement, in which students participate in establishing the conditions of their attendance and the level of contact with teaching and support staff. The College is mindful of the possible costs of this strategy, as it implies extensive levels of support and constant interaction with students. It is also a challenge to be collecting all the personal and pastoral issues the students are likely to face, and developing appropriate responses. To this end, the College intends to work with external partners that offer counselling and other methods of support for its students.

### **5. Investment**

Icon College is committed to the idea that no student accessing public funds should be discouraged from applying to a course at the College because of financial considerations.

We acknowledge that levels of debt clearly deter student applications from low- income families and this presents a real risk to maintaining current levels of access. Whilst we cannot provide additional maintenance support for students from low- income households we will do all we can to ensure the level of pastoral care provision is of a high standard to support students in financial difficulty. This will be reviewed on an annual basis.

### **6. Provision of information**

The College will ensure that full details of its access measures, including a detailed description of financial support arrangements are published in future editions of the College prospectus and on the web.

We shall provide in a timely manner such information as the SLC and when appropriate UCAS require in order to support their applicant facing web services.

### **7. Resource Plan**

Over the next three years the College intends to plan for financial resources needed to support student access and participation. The forecast will be based on realistic figures, both current and over the previous years. The plan will also be informed by the requirements of the changes introduced by the Higher Education and Research Act 2017.

The College will endeavour to operate a student access and participation policy and plan that maximises student engagement and more effectively promotes the student voice. This will engender the concept of fair access to entry; student participation in the establishment of their conditions of attendance once recruited, and the level of contact with teaching and support staff throughout their studies. The College will ensure through the implementation of the plan that students are offered quality access to their studies and full participation in how their programme is taught and assessed.

The College is aware that embedding the access and participation plan brings with it increased costs as it implies intensive levels of support, greater interaction with students and more complex organizational, management and committee activity. The College is reflecting on the resources required to fully support the delivery of the plan.

