

'Leadership in learning; excellence at work'



Higher Education Strategy 2013-2016

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Introduction

Welcome to our Higher Education Strategy 2013-2016, which builds on and consolidates our achievements and successes in higher education (HE) over the last twenty-five years. Working at the heart of the community, building aspiration and skills, Blackpool and The Fylde College and its graduates continue to make a significant contribution to economic, cultural and social growth. Our extensive work with key local, national and international employers enriches our students' experience and provides them with the essential graduate skills they need to help them succeed in life and work.

The HE context has undergone significant change over the last few years, with the introduction of tuition fees, increased competition and rapidly changing technologies and expectations. We believe this represents an opportunity for Blackpool and The Fylde College to continue to be highly successful through our unwavering commitment to high quality learning and teaching, a culture of continuous enhancement and collaboration, and the centrality of our students in all that we do.

Our recent outstanding QAA review and OFSTED grade 1 inspection, both in 2013, clearly endorse the culture of excellence in which the College operates.

We believe in the transformative potential of HE, for individuals and their families, for businesses, for communities and the economy as a whole. This strategy sets the direction of travel over the next three years, with six strategic aims designed to further unlock that potential. It reflects the values and ethos of the whole College community. I encourage you to engage with it, to use it and to work with it to help facilitate our shared ambitions.

Best wishes,



Bev Robinson

Principal and Chief Executive
Blackpool and The Fylde College



"QAA - commended for enhancement of student learning opportunities and quality of information. Eleven areas of good practice around inclusivity, employability and innovative assessment linked to the world of work."

"Ofsted - Grade 1 outstanding"



UK Quality Assured

Reviewed 2013

Our vision for HE

At the heart of our continuing vision for HE at Blackpool and The Fylde College is a desire to provide an outstanding educational experience through a highly responsive curriculum; teaching and learning excellence is absolutely central.

Our outstanding QAA review (May 2013) endorsed the dynamic and embedded culture of enhancement, which pervades HE in our College - this strategy embodies that culture and sets out the wider vision and the specifics of the realisation of that vision over the next three years. Central to all of this will be our successful application for Foundation Degree Awarding Powers and the continuing development of our existing strong relationships with our principal awarding partners.

We understand the vital role of HE as a key driver for economic and social progression, and that it is personally transformational; we continue to have ambitious plans to increase the availability and accessibility of vocational HE that will therefore meet the needs of the local and regional population as well as business and industry. In response to several key reports (Lancashire Growth Plan, Fylde Coast Employment and Skills Strategy, Northern Prosperity is National Prosperity), our strategy includes the expansion of priority curriculum areas including support for energy innovation and sustainable industries, construction, health and social care, creative industries, advanced manufacturing, and leisure and tourism education to support regeneration and expansion. Our specialist maritime provision at the Fleetwood Nautical Campus continues to provide outstanding education and training locally, nationally and internationally, and there is scope for further growth to meet evident need.

A clear priority continues to be leadership and management skills development to support a growing high value economy and a focus on higher level apprenticeships and up-skilling opportunities for those who wish to progress further at work. We currently support Higher Apprenticeships in Project Management, IT and Care; we will continue to explore the further potential for this type of provision over the life of the strategy, especially given the clear message from the CBI (July 2013) that more alternatives to the 'default' route of an undergraduate degree will facilitate economic growth.

Lifelong learning is a central concept, and clear routes into, and through, HE will be further developed; both our Access to HE and non-prescribed HE provision supporting continuous professional development will remain central to our vision of a ladder of progression, and we will work closely with our university partners to raise aspirations and access to postgraduate study. We will actively encourage students to develop a lifelong relationship with the College from pre-entry, to undergraduate and alumni.

In a multi-disciplinary and fast changing world, a central consideration also remains the development of graduate employability skills, including enterprise and entrepreneurship, in addition to key transferable skills such as digital and academic literacies and critical awareness (Lancashire Enterprise Partnership 2013). Alongside in-depth subject knowledge, we will equip our graduates for life and work beyond the College and enable them to thrive, helping to ensure their success.

Continued...

Strategic Aim 1

“To provide an outstanding experience for all HE students, informed by scholarship and professional practice, which is vibrant, engaging and supportive, and which both challenges and inspires.”

Our vision for HE

Recent changes to the HE landscape have meant increased competition and a more challenging recruitment environment. We believe that providing high quality, accessible, employment-focused HE remains key to our continued growth. For our principal customers, our students, we fully recognise that decisions about what and where to study will be crucial; we will continue to provide clear advice, guidance and information to enable informed choice, and curriculum which meets their needs and adds genuine value. Personalised learning tailored to individual needs will include high quality, targeted support to help all students reach their full potential.

Whilst the market adjusts to differing demand for subjects and the emergence of new professions and roles as we head to 2020, we will continue to proactively engage with a wide range of employers and organisations to address the skills needed by local and regional industries, and provide clear information on progression pathways between skill levels to facilitate planned growth. The development of even more responsive, flexible and innovative approaches is an absolute prerequisite; through leading edge technologies, communications and environments we will become more responsive, customer focused and available electronically 24/7. An enhanced focus on the facilitation of 'learn while you earn models' of study is essential. Over the life of the strategy all HE provision will be delivered through an integrated online and face to face model ensuring even greater accessibility and adding real value; we will have identified and successfully developed selected distance based provision to meet market demand and will continue to fully engage in the debate around OpenCourseWare in today's digital world. We will ensure that students are fully supported in order to take advantage of these opportunities.

Our plan to secure Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP) we see as complementary to our existing provision, allowing us further flexibility and an even greater ability to respond dynamically to national, regional and local employers and our community.

Internal progression to HE from Level 3 and from Foundation Degree to Bachelor's top-up will continue to be a focus going forward and key targets will be developed that reflect the nature of student cohorts and the mapping of the FE and HE curricula. Additionally the further enhancement of our highly successful outreach and schools liaison work, which has significantly contributed to our excellent record in widening participation, will continue to build aspiration and ambition amongst potential students.

It is very clear that College HE remains a key priority nationally, recognising our contribution to the diversity of the sector through providing choice for students, reaching out to non-traditional HE learners, and in delivering locally-relevant, future-focused vocational HE and lifelong learning. In the 2011 white paper 'Students at the Heart of the System' the Government acknowledged that facilitating a response to student demand necessitates enabling a greater diversity of provision which in turn means 'more HE in further education colleges, more variety in modes of learning'. This strategy is a direct response to this agenda.

Strategic Aim 2

“Through the continuous development of our highly responsive, employment and future-focused curriculum, to enable students to develop the knowledge and skills which will prepare them with confidence for future success in work and life.”

Who we are

Blackpool and The Fylde is a Further Education College with a history of service to the community and vocational excellence; its routes can be traced to a school for fisherman founded in 1892 in Fleetwood, and more recently in 1938 to the formation of a technical college. The College has a sustained and close connection to the sea and the coast, a commitment to excellence and a culture of continuous enhancement. Bounded by Morecombe Bay to the north, the Ribble estuary to the south, the Irish Sea to the west and the Bowland hills to the east, we benefit from a beautiful and diverse location steeped in history; Blackpool is Europe's most visited tourist resort which is set for further success thanks to a multi million pound programme of regeneration.

HE has been a key element of the continuing success of the College since 1988 and is central to our ambition to act as a catalyst for change in our local communities through enabling economic regeneration and social inclusion. For the seventh consecutive year, significant growth was achieved in the recruitment of HE students, rising from 1,424 in 2006/07 to 2,743 in 2012/13, clearly demonstrating the success of our continuing mission. With a turnover of over £53 million, we are the 19th largest general further education college in England and the 3rd largest provider of college HE nationally. We operate from four major campuses and three learning centres located along a seventeen mile stretch of the Fylde coastline. We also have a significant number of training courses delivered in nearly ten other venues that have been developed to meet the needs of employers.

HE is delivered through the following academic schools, predominantly at our dedicated central University Centre, but also at both the main Bispham Campus and the Fleetwood Nautical Campus:

- Professional Studies
- Construction
- Creative Arts

- Engineering & Computing
- Hospitality, Tourism & Sport
- Maritime Operations
- Society, Health & Childhood

The College is an Associate College and accredited partner of Lancaster University; this long-standing relationship is both highly valued and valuable. Our new relationship with and recent accreditation by the University of Salford offers significant potential for further enhancements to both the curriculum and the student experience. Our partnership with Liverpool John Moores University remains central to the delivery of our specialist maritime provision and our long-standing work with Edexcel for our Higher National provision will continue to provide stability and growth.

In May 2013 the Quality Assurance Authority (QAA) confirmed that the academic standards and awards the College offers on behalf of its awarding bodies and the quality of student learning opportunities fully meet UK expectations. In addition, the QAA highly commended the College both for the quality of the information produced about its learning opportunities and the enhancement of student learning opportunities. With no recommendations for further actions, the outstanding review also cited 11 areas of good practice centred on inclusivity and employability, valuable links to the world of work and eLearning provision, on which we will continue to capitalise.

With a long established reputation in both FE and HE, an existing base of strong student satisfaction and significant success in widening participation, we are proud of the crucial contribution we make educationally, economically, socially and culturally. With clear dynamic leadership, highly professional staff who really care about what they do and how they do it, a commitment to continuous enhancement, and a responsive and collaborative culture, we believe we are well placed to drive further growth and excellence.

Strategic Aim 3

“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.”

College mission

The College mission recognises the focus on employability skills to drive economic growth and aims to provide:

'Leadership in learning; excellence at work'

Blackpool and The Fylde College serves individuals, communities and employers by providing excellent learning opportunities that enhance social development and contribute to economic success. Our College transforms lives by inspiring learners to achieve their potential in a supportive learning environment.

College values

- Placing the student at the heart of all we do
- Showing fairness, courtesy and mutual respect
- Teaching and learning as the key to our success
- Aspiring to excellence: quality is everyone's responsibility
- Working together to get the best result
- Empowering others to achieve their potential

College priorities

- **Excellence**
We will deliver and be known for excellence
- **Enterprise, innovation and regeneration**
We will support economic growth and skills development through innovative and responsive provision and strong partnerships with local stakeholders
- **Employer responsiveness**
We will be the provider of choice for employers in the North West
- **Effectiveness and efficiency**
We will secure and use resources effectively and efficiently to sustain high quality learning and ensure value for money
- **Equality and diversity**
We will ensure a socially inclusive College for students and employees
- **Ethical approach to the environment**
We will promote and support sustainable development to ensure a more sustainable community

Strategic Aim 4

“To build on our outstanding success in widening participation, raising aspiration and access for those in work and from a range of different backgrounds, and providing progression opportunities through effective and targeted advice, guidance, outreach and liaison work.”

HE strategic aims

By 2016, through an unswerving focus on our students and the quality of their educational experience, we will secure continued growth and be the provider of choice for HE across the Fylde coast and beyond.

Through our commitment to continuous enhancement, by the end of 2016 we will have consolidated our reputation as the leading provider of College HE and will have been granted Foundation Degree Awarding Powers.

We will continue to be a vibrant academic community working in close partnership to achieve shared goals. Our highly effective relationships with employers, organisations and industry will continue to meet skills gaps and facilitate economic growth. In addition to in-depth subject knowledge, we will equip our outstanding graduates with the essential attributes and skills in readiness for the future:

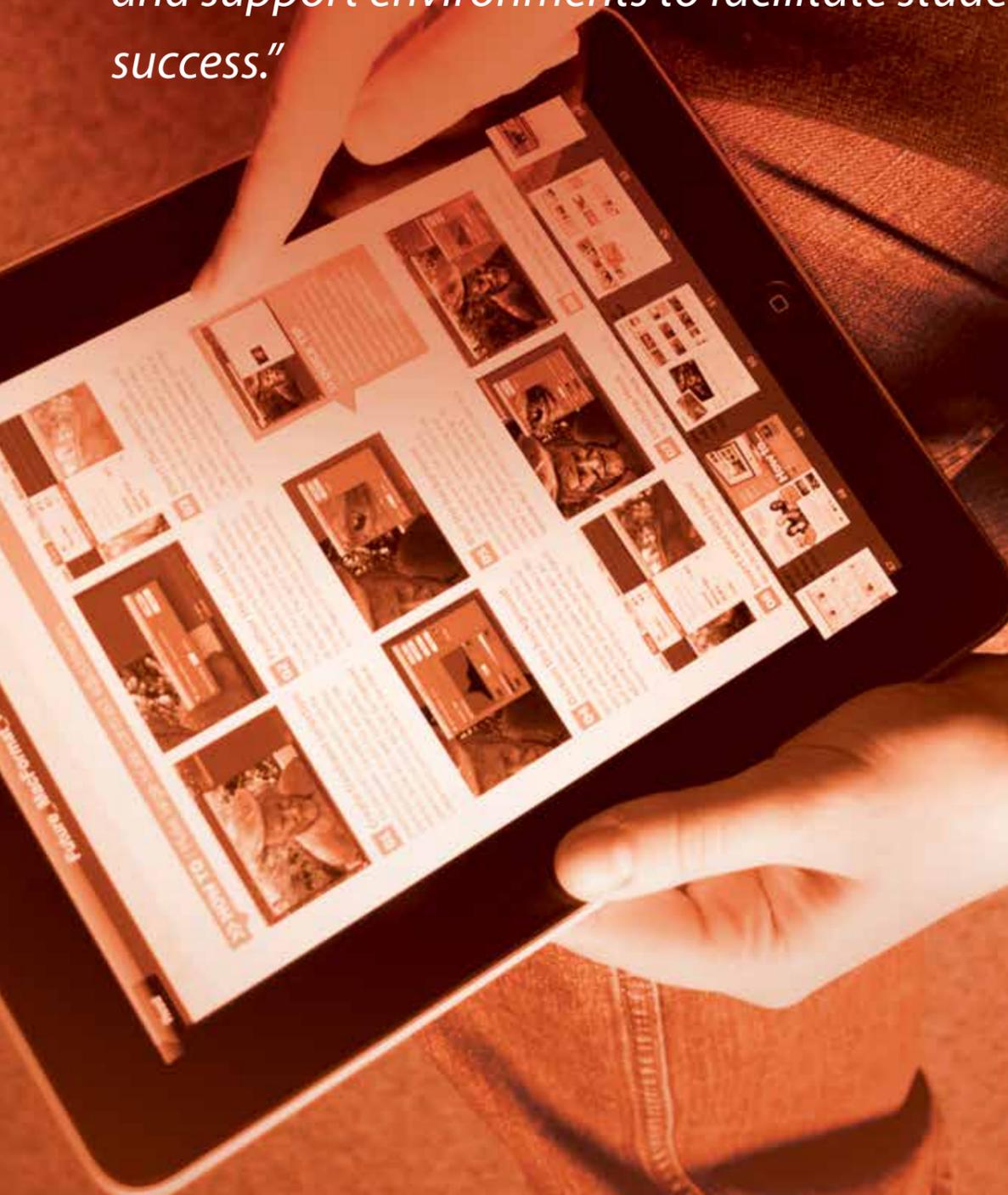
- A commitment to lifelong learning and career development
- Collaborative teamwork and leadership skills
- Personal and intellectual autonomy
- Ethical, social and professional understanding
- Communication, information and digital literacies
- Global citizenship
- Research, scholarship and enquiry skills
- Enterprise and entrepreneurial awareness and capabilities

Our six strategic aims:

- 1.** To provide an outstanding experience for all HE students, informed by scholarship and professional practice, which is vibrant, engaging and supportive, and which both challenges and inspires.
- 2.** Through the continuous development of our highly responsive, employment and future-focused curriculum, to enable students to develop the knowledge and skills which will prepare them with confidence for future success in work and life.
- 3.** 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.
- 4.** To build on our outstanding success in widening participation, raising aspiration and access for those in work and from a range of different backgrounds, and providing progression opportunities through effective and targeted advice, guidance, outreach and liaison work.
- 5.** To continue to provide and enhance high quality, flexible HE learning opportunities and support environments to facilitate student success.
- 6.** To work in partnership with our students and staff, empowering them to further develop our dynamic and engaged academic community.

Strategic Aim 5

“To continue to provide and enhance high quality, flexible higher education learning opportunities and support environments to facilitate student success.”



Measuring our success

Growth

We will meet planned enrolment targets set through the business planning process.

Student satisfaction (NSS)

We will be in the top quartile in all categories. Currently we are in the top quartile for:

- Assessment and feedback
- Academic Support
- Personal development

(NSS 2013)

Student success

We will ensure that the proportion of students achieving a first or 2:1 classification equals that nationally. We will raise the attainment of students achieving a merit or distinction to 70%.

Student retention

We will work towards an in-year retention of 93%.

Teaching quality

We will be in the top quartile for overall student satisfaction with teaching. We are already in the top quartile for:

- Staff making the subject interesting
- Staff being enthusiastic about what they teach

Reviews of HE teaching and learning will be consistently good or outstanding.

Teaching modality

Over the life of the strategy, all HE will be available through a blended mix of face to face and interactive online modes, with availability 24/7.

Work-ready graduates

We will ensure that all graduates will have the opportunity to experience at least one of the following:

- A work placement
- An international study experience
- An enrichment opportunity linked to key graduate skills
- A research project

Widening participation

We will maintain the proportion of students accessing HE from the lowest participation areas (Polar 3 quintile 1).

Academic portfolio

We will conduct a full review of the academic portfolio, consulting all key stakeholders to ensure the curriculum is fully employment and future-focused.

Foundation Degree Awarding Powers (FDAP)

We will have successfully achieved FDAP.

Strategic Aim 6

“To work in partnership with our students and staff, empowering them to further develop our dynamic and engaged academic community.”

Relevance to you

This strategy sets the direction of travel and is essentially a guide to focus our activities and enable our continuing success; it is very much a practical tool to enable us to meet our shared ambitions.

The strategy will be supported, driven and continually reviewed through our annual business planning process and key performance indicators will allow us to monitor our progress. It is relevant for a range of key partners.

For students

The strategy provides information about what we believe is important and sets out our intention to engage with you as a partner.

For colleagues

The strategy identifies our strategic aims and will help to guide you in your work to help deliver our shared ambitions.

For our partners

The strategy outlines our mission and ethos and details how we will work collaboratively with you to support you in achieving your goals.

Quality Assurance Agency (QAA)

Judgements

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the HE provision at Blackpool and The Fylde College.

- The academic standards that the College offers on behalf of its awarding bodies meet UK expectations for threshold standards.
- The quality of student learning opportunities at the College meets UK expectations
- The quality of information produced by the College about its learning opportunities is commended
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities at the College is commended

Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of good practice at Blackpool and The Fylde College:

- the clear link between the College's commitment to inclusivity and employability, and the resulting innovative assessment tasks
- the variety of assessment tasks and their relevance to the world of work, which was valued by students and employers
- the College's anticipatory approach to the consideration of and investment in learning resources
- the extensive and valuable contribution of students to the quality assurance and enhancement activities of the College

- the integrated approach to the provision of learning opportunities to enable the entitlements of disabled students to be met in the wider context of a College ethos of inclusivity
- the integrated and innovative approach to the provision of blended learning opportunities and eResources using the virtual learning environment, which is both comprehensive and reliable
- the high-quality website, which provides a user-friendly point of contact for the College's intended audiences
- the positive contribution made by the role of the HE Development Manager to the development and production of high-quality and accessible course data and management information
- the comprehensive and continuing development of the virtual learning environment that facilitates effective dissemination of information, providing a 'one-stop shop' for students and staff
- the positive contribution of the College's equality and diversity agenda to the enhancement of learning opportunities across its HE provision
- the embedded culture of enhancement, as exemplified by the strategic leadership provided by the HE Directorate, and the complementary high levels of awareness among, and involvement of, staff and students across the College.



Photograph: Lynn Brown BA(Hons) Photography



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