



UNIVERSITY
CENTRE
WESTON

HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGIC PLAN

2021-22 TO 2023-24

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FOREWORD BY **THE PRINCIPAL**

Weston College's mission is "Creating Brighter Futures" and University Centre Weston (UCW) supports its graduates by inspiring their ambition, enabling their success and delivering an outstanding Higher Education (HE) experience. This plan sets out UCW's aspirations for the future with our students and partners central to all we plan to achieve.

Since the previous UCW strategic plan, higher education within the Weston College Group has continued to grow in terms of student numbers and provision, with more students enrolled than ever before. This has been achieved through the launch of popular Higher and Degree Apprenticeships in engineering, digital and health, along with the conversion of courses to full Honours Degrees.

The previous strategic planning period also saw the Weston College Group invest millions of pounds in new facilities such as the Health and Active Living Centre at Loxton Campus, the Animal Management Centre at Puxton Park and University Centre Weston within the iconic Winter Gardens.

UCW continues to benefit from the strong and effective partnerships with our awarding bodies – Bath Spa University, UWE Bristol and Hartpury University – regional and national employers and other stakeholders. UCW remains ambitious, determined to grow, focused on quality and ensuring excellent outcomes for students. We recognise that we can only achieve our ambitious plans for the future by working in partnership. We remain committed to working together and are excited about what we will achieve next for students studying higher level programmes. We will continue to work with our partners and stakeholders to explore how we can strengthen our position and best respond to learner and employer demands, including considering the potential of becoming a University for the region.

Weston College leads the West of England Institute of Technology (WEIoT) and UCW is now working in collaboration with other parts of the Group, UWE Bristol and four other further education Colleges as part of this initiative. The WEIoT continues to receive national recognition as part of the government's network of Institutes of Technology – collaborations between leading employers, further education colleges and universities. Specialising in delivering high-quality Higher Technical Education and training in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects, such as digital, advanced manufacturing and engineering, providing employers with the skilled workforce they need. The WEIoT share ambitious targets for growth and reaching underrepresented groups within the region and UCW will work to support the achievement of these targets.

UCW continues to outperform national benchmarks in terms of Honours students achieving first-class degrees and National Student Survey (NSS) results. It remains committed to widening access to higher education for students from underrepresented groups and being a fully inclusive HE provider. We are determined to extend the HE learning opportunities for potential students so as many people as possible, in our local communities, benefit from access to a wide range of higher education and are supported to achieve excellent outcomes and enhance their careers.

This document outlines UCW's strategic aims, how they will be achieved and the key performance indicators to measure success in the period 2021/22 to 2023/24.



UNIVERSITY CENTRE WESTON: THE CONTEXT FOR HIGHER EDUCATION PROVISION

UCW is the part of Weston College Group, led by Dr Paul Phillips CBE, Principal and Chief Executive, which delivers higher education (HE) provision. Weston College is a dynamic and responsive Further and Higher Education College serving the needs of the business, learners and the community in North Somerset and beyond. It continues to thrive and achieve excellence.

In 2018 UCW successfully registered with the Office for Students (OfS) with no conditions. UCW maintains a strong relationship with the OfS and has undertaken a health checking process to ensure UCW remains compliant with all relevant conditions of registration. In 2017 UCW was awarded TEF Gold placing it amongst the elite of HE teaching and learning. This prestigious award was retained and extended twice based on data and outcomes of students, demonstrating the excellent learning opportunities and outcomes of students. In 2016 UCW received the highest judgement of 'commended outcome' from the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for Higher Education. The Higher Education Review (HER) identified good practice with no recommendations or affirmations, and no interventions have been made since.

UCW is managed by the HE Directorate, which has a management and support infrastructure that is bespoke to higher education provision, supporting teaching excellence. Whilst the directorate work closely with staff across the Weston College Group, in recognition of the different regulations which apply to HE and the varied stakeholders and partners UCW works with, the directorate has staff who focus on assuring the quality of teaching, learning, assessment and the student experience. Due to the significant numbers of students UCW have

who face considerable barriers to completing their studies the Higher Education Academic Registry Team focus on providing welfare, wellbeing and financial support to help ensure student retention and achievement remains high. This is supported by a governance, management and meeting structure which has responsibility and oversight of the maintenance of academic standards and assures the quality of learning opportunities and student experience.

UCW has mature and effective relationships with its awarding partners established in long-term collaborative and strategic partnership agreements. UCW's awarding partners are Bath Spa University, University of the West of England (Bristol) and Hartpury University. With its partners UCW now offers a wide range of degree-level courses which include full Honours Degrees, Foundation Degrees, Honours top-up Degrees, Higher National Certificates and Diplomas and Higher and Degree Apprenticeships. The provision is diverse in nature with a breadth of subject disciplines on offer and UCW now has over 1000 students registered.

UCW recruits a broad mix of students with a significant proportion from underrepresented groups including students from non-traditional pathways, nearly 50% from underrepresented or disadvantaged backgrounds - Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) quintile one and two - and almost 30% of students who declare a disability or specific learning difference.

UCW regards students/apprentices as partners in their learning and works with them to receive feedback, enhance their experience and consult with them regarding the future aims and ambitions of the institution. They are involved in decision making at all levels of the organisation sitting on the Governing Body and attending strategic committees. UCW aims to provide all students with an outstanding student experience, providing access to excellent facilities and supporting future career success.

The landscape for Higher Education has changed significantly over the previous planning period and the Governments skills agenda, along with the development of higher and degree apprenticeships has required UCW to develop new types of programmes. The Government see reforming Technical Education as key to improving productivity, enhancing social mobility, making a success of Brexit and rebuilding following the global pandemic. There is, and will continue to be, a need for upskilling, reskilling and retraining, getting people back into work as quickly as possible. UCW will need to offer flexible, practical training that leads directly to jobs. Higher Technical Qualifications and short courses are now a clear element of UCW's strategy, alongside higher and degree apprenticeships and the priorities already outlined within the WEIoT to support employers to develop their workforce for the future.

The HE sector is highly competitive and UCW has a range of Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) on its doorstep, so UCW needs to be exceptional and have effective strategies to achieve growth. The OfS is currently consulting in many areas including quality assurance, the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), admissions and the National Student Survey (NSS). Changes to Access and Participation Plans have been announced but are not defined and there is not clarity regarding the Lifelong Loan Entitlement. As a result, there will be a need for UCW to remain responsive and flexible, able to adapt to changing priorities. However, this plan provides some clarity regarding UCW's ethos, culture and priorities for the future against this changing HE context.



UCW IN NUMBERS / FACTS

39% of students are achieving **FIRST CLASS HONOURS**

48% of students are from **POLAR Quintiles 1 / 2**

WEIoT has met all its **TARGETS**

4 NEW Higher / Degree Apprenticeships have been approved with 2 more being developed.

90% **RETENTION RATE**

National Student Survey (NSS) Overall Satisfaction rates have been above the National Average for the last 5 academic years.

NSS Teaching on my Course above the National Average for the last 3 academic years.

16 NEW Three Year Honours courses and 1 Foundation Degree have been approved during the period of the last plan with 2 more being developed.

30% of students have a **disability or specific learning difference.**

In 2020/21 all the **aggregated areas** within the **NSS were above the National Average** sector wide figures, and four of the nine sections had results within the Top Quartile.



OUTCOMES AND PERFORMANCE AGAINST THE STRATEGIC PLAN AIMS 2017-18 TO 2020-21

1. To provide a positive, vibrant student experience characterised by excellence in learning and teaching, and a supportive, nurturing learning environment.

TEF Gold was retained and extended through this period which demonstrates the excellent learning opportunities and outcomes of students. This places UCW amongst the elite of HE teaching and learning. UCW continued to maintain, develop and diversify its curriculum whilst ensuring the student experience is vibrant. Whilst delivery was moving towards more inclusive and innovative delivery methods, COVID19 accelerated this with Microsoft Teams now being used to support teaching, learning and assessment. Staff continue to engage in regular Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and scholarly activity to ensure pedagogy and subject knowledge remains current.

2. To grow the student intake by 25 per cent over the duration of the strategic planning period by attracting, recruiting and retaining diverse and ambitious students.

UCW has increased overall student numbers significantly over the period of the previous plan with UCW now having over 1000 HE students which was a key milestone. Whilst most other HE in FE institutions have declined UCW continues to develop. Over the period of the last plan 15 new full Honours degrees, 1 Foundation Degree and 4 new Higher / Degree Apprenticeships have been approved with more currently being developed. This has maintained numbers on more traditional modes of study, but UCW has seen significant growth through the development of Higher / Degree Apprenticeship and numbers of students and employers choosing this pathway continues to rise. Due to this change in demand UCW is actively developing new apprenticeship options.

3. Through excellence in quality assurance, effective governance and academic management, ensure that standards are maintained and the student experience is safeguarded.

Governance and management systems are effective in ensuring standards are maintained and where areas for development are identified action plans are devised and implemented. A new Academic Quality and Standards Committee was established in 2020 alongside the Governing body Curriculum and Quality Committee both of which have oversight of quality and standards, scrutinise data, management and processes along with the overall student experience. TEF Gold has been extended twice and partnership and external examiner reports are strong supporting the quality of provision. NSS Satisfaction remains high and above the sector average, demonstrating that student experience is positive.

4. To engage with the widening participation agenda and successfully recruit non-traditional or disadvantaged students by making higher education accessible to them.

UCW remains committed to widening participation and giving all students with the potential to succeed the opportunity to progress to higher education. A programme of outreach activities is delivered within the local community starting at primary level through to year 13. As a result, the number of students progressing to UCW from disadvantaged and non-traditional backgrounds remains high. In 2020-21 48% of students were from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2, with 23.5% from POLAR quintile 1, which reflects those most underrepresented and least likely to progress to higher education. The vast majority come from vocational pathways, 43.65%, join with BTEC qualifications. In addition, 42% of students were over 21 at the start of their course and 28% of students have a disability or specific learning difference. Outcomes for these non-traditional, underrepresented students remain good with numbers achieving "Good Degrees" in line with other students.

5. To focus on employability and nurture resilient, self-assured individuals with graduate attributes who demonstrate the skills to enter employment, self-employment, as well as enterprise and innovation.

Preparing UCW learners for work and directly supporting their progression is central to the design and delivery of our curricular. The latest Graduate Outcome information for UCW is positive with 92% progression to work and 69% into 'higher level roles'. Our links with over 2,000 regional employers and close partnership working ensures UCW students have the best opportunities for positive graduate employment outcomes. UCW has invested in a Careers Consultant to support progression to further study and employment, providing careers information, advice and guidance by delivering group sessions, tutorials and 1-1 work. They work with targeted students and manage Careers Week.

6. Ensure that UCW is an attractive place to work, with an academic community that engenders a culture of enhancing staff knowledge, research, scholarship, innovation and collegiality.

UCW continues to invest in CPD to allow staff the opportunity to develop their subject specialism and pedagogy, along with providing opportunities for them to return to industry to upskill and ensure UCW continues to develop the skills employers require. Ongoing HE Continuing Professional Development (CPD) along with the annual HE Conference continue to encourage the sharing of best practice in addition to inviting external speakers to provide insight into identified areas of development.

7. To collaborate effectively with university partners, employers and key stakeholders in the development of new provision and the sharing of best practice.

UCW has strong and effective partnerships with external stakeholders and funding bodies along with our awarding HEI's. Through our partnership with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and North Somerset council we created UCW at the Winter Gardens - a dedicated university centre for North Somerset, which enables us to build for the future. Monthly Partnership and Operational Meetings with our HEI partners enable discussions regarding future developments and enhancement of current provision. Partnerships with employers are extensive through our higher and Degree Apprenticeship programmes as well as our full time Degree programmes. Our network of employer partners has extended significantly over the course of the previous strategic planning period and includes partnership with the largest primes, such as Airbus and the NHS Trusts through to small local businesses. Accreditation from both the Charter Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) and the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) have been approved during 2020-21.

8. To demonstrate financial probity, viability and sustainability in all UCW activities.

The income from UCW continues to increase with student numbers and the budget is well managed ensuring that the student experience is continually enhanced and that UCW makes a positive contribution to the Weston College Group.



VISION AND AIMS 2021-2023/4

1. Extending the UCW Community to all higher-level study, positioning UCW as a first choice for professional, technical, and academic study at levels 4-6 for regional students and employers.

UCW celebrates all forms of higher education and already offers a wide range of different qualifications including higher and degree apprenticeships. UCW will offer a diverse curriculum with flexible delivery options. We will continue to develop new Honours Degrees along with Higher / Degree Apprenticeships and Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) to meet regional and national demands of employers and students, providing training to meet current skills gaps. In addition, we will embrace and further promote professional qualifications at levels 4-6 and extend the UCW community to these students/apprentices so they all have a voice, can access support and are part of our graduation celebrations.

UCW is confident about the quality of our provision and employers, applicants and awarding bodies can have confidence in the quality of teaching and overall student experience at all levels demonstrated by student achievement and external review. Our programme will empower students to enhance their skills, knowledge and career opportunities. Further study options will also be discussed with students at each level.

Performance Indicators:

- Develop a minimum of two new programmes a year (degrees, higher / degree apprenticeships or HTQ's).
- All Higher Education routes, including Professional programmes and Apprenticeships included in UCW promotional materials / website.
- Extend support / professional services to all higher education students and ensure accessibility to these services.
- Continuation, Completion and Progression data exceeds OfS minimum numerical thresholds for all students and apprentices.

2. Building on UCW's quality profile ensuring UCW delivers a high-quality learning experience for all students and maintains its reputation with HEI partners, employer partners and regulatory bodies.

UCW is recognised for its outstanding quality profile and through external quality reviews and ongoing monitoring visits has been recognised as having significant best practice. UCW now has multiple quality bodies to adhere to and will ensure all appropriate requirements are met.

UCW programmes will continue to be designed with employers to ensure they are focused on providing students/apprentices with the knowledge and skills employers value. All these programmes will be delivered by staff who are experienced and passionate about their subject. Teaching and learning will be high quality and engaging, and assessment reliable and continually reviewed. Staff are required to engage in continuous professional development and scholarly activity to ensure currency of pedagogy, along with subject and industry knowledge. Staff will be actively encouraged to return to industry in addition to engaging with higher level qualifications.

Through the development and approval of new programmes, UCW will continue to look for opportunities to combine modules and deliver them across programmes to enhance the student experience, enable staff to teach to specialisms and ensure sustainability of provision.

The enhancement budget will support innovative activity to enrich curriculum, provide additional opportunities for students / apprentices and enable input from guest lecturers.

Academic standards, outcomes and student satisfaction will be reported and scrutinised by internal committees and the Governing body.

Performance Indicators:

- Partnership Agreements in place with key organisations.
- Continuation, Completion and Progression data exceeds OfS minimum numerical thresholds for all students and apprentices.
- Evidencing outstanding quality features to retain TEF award.
- NSS "Teaching on my course" above national average.
- NSS "Learning Opportunities" above national average.
- Apprenticeships judged to be at least Good through Ofsted inspection.
- Increased numbers of staff engaging with scholarly activity in the workplace, obtaining professional accreditation and higher-level study.

3. Increasing the intake at UCW by 100 additional learners annually by 2023/24, maximising internal progression and developing new programmes in new markets.

Maximising internal progression across the College from both 16 to 18, apprenticeship and adult programmes is central to UCW's growth strategy. UCW will work across the group to deliver tutorials and targeted subject activities to support progression and meet targets.

Maintaining effective partnerships with awarding bodies, employers and regulatory bodies is essential to UCW's future success. Working with partners and employers UCW will identify skills shortages and training needs, developing new flexible programmes capitalising on Apprenticeship and Higher Technical Qualification (HTQ) opportunities as well as exploring CPD options and Level 7 study.

In addition, UCW will trial short and modular HE programmes to support students to try higher education before committing to a full programme and earn credits towards a degree so they can build up their higher-level study in a flexible way to meet their career aspirations.

UCW will continue to work closely with the West of England Institute for Technology (IOT) to ensure that the ambitious targets are met.

Performance Indicators:

- Achieving specified growth in student numbers.
- Meeting IOT Recruitment Targets.
- Increase Internal Progression by 5% over the period of the plan.
- To bring additional efficiencies and improved learner experience by ensuring programmes are designed and revalidated to enable modules in related areas to be jointly delivered.
- Development a minimum of two new programmes a year.
- Delivery of HTQ Digital from 2022 and at least two other areas over the period of the plan.



4. Create an inclusive institution, promoting participation from students from all backgrounds, and raising the profile of UCW's approach to ensuring positive outcomes for all.

UCW is committed to widening participation and providing opportunities for all applicants with potential, regardless of background, to access higher education, achieve their qualification and progress into employment. UCW will continue to support outreach and attainment raising activity, especially to underrepresented groups, whilst celebrating the diversity and achievements within our student population.

UCW's approach to Universal Design for Learning is innovative, supporting successful outcomes for all, by offering increased flexibility and variety in teaching, learning and assessment. It has the potential to be recognised nationally as best practice within the sector and UCW intends to raise the profile of this framework and our approach to inclusivity and share this through the SEND Centre for Excellence and other best practice forums.

Significant progress was also made in terms of the accessibility of HE learning and teaching through lockdown with lectures recorded or streamed and made available to students / apprentices, supporting anyone with specific learning differences, experiencing illness or with caring responsibilities. UCW wants to build on this by ensuring formal sessions are available along with video assessment briefs to enable students/apprentices to revisit the explanation and Specialist Support staff to watch and discuss with those with a specific learning difference or disability. In addition, UCW aims to ensure assessments are inclusive and provide all students/apprentices with an opportunity to achieve their best work without disadvantage.

UCW will continue to encourage applications from all students and redress the gender bias in some professions, actively encouraging females into STEM subjects and males into healthcare. We continue to reflect on addressing our staff mix in these areas along with positively profiling and promoting non-traditional students in these areas to challenge gender stereotypes and as a means of inspiration and encouragement for others.

Performance Indicators:

- NSS "Teaching on my course" above national average.
- To maintain high numbers of students/apprentices from underrepresented groups – students who are mature, have a disability or specific learning difference, have care experience, are Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) or come from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Develop a new Access and Participation Plan (APP) which aligns with the new OfS priorities.
- To embed the Universal Design for Learning Framework across all programmes ensuring alternative assessments are available and that the use of lecture capture is effective for students and technology is used to support learning.
- Universal Design for Learning disseminated through the SEND Centre of Excellence and other appropriate channels.
- Specialist staff input into external committees / organisations.

5. To provide outstanding support and a vibrant and enriching student experience which nurtures and develops skills, resilience, wellbeing and personal development supporting the long-term success of students and apprentices.

UCW is known for the outstanding support offered to all students. It is often one of the key reasons students choose to study with us and is regularly recognised as best practice through reviews / approval events and external examiners reports. UCW will continue to support transition, ensure student continuation and retention remains high, and support progression. With smaller class sizes than traditional universities, the personal and professional relationships with academic staff and the outstanding support offered by pastoral and support services remains key to our approach and sets us apart from competitors.

UCW will take a flexible approach to support in all forms with both in person or online appointments available, via Teams, so students/apprentices can more easily access support at a convenient time, from the workplace and in the way that suits them best.

UCW is not just committed to ensuring students remain on course, complete their studies and develop the skills, strategies and resilience to pursue a rewarding career. A programme of wellbeing events, which promote positive mental health, build community and a sense of belonging will be delivered to enable students/apprentices to collaborate, build networks and learn to manage their own mental health. Providing support to those in crisis, in person and online, will always be essential in addition to preventative strategies.

The Academic Development Programme is embedded within curriculum to support students/apprentices to enhance their skills and begins with Headstart to support transition. We recognise some students are returning to study and balancing this with family commitments and work, so we want to ensure all students have the skills to succeed and achieve their full potential.

All students/apprentices have access to meaningful individual and group tutorials to help them progress on their programme and develop personally, building their skills towards an enriching career or further study. UCW will ensure all students have access to industry experts and careers information, advice and guidance to support them to make informed decisions about their future. Students will have opportunities to engage with work-based learning / placements to enhance their prospects. Our links with over 2,000 regional employers and close partnership working ensures UCW students have the best opportunities for positive graduate employment outcomes.

UCW regards students/apprentices as partners in their learning and continues to consult with them regarding their experience and involve them in decision making at all levels of the organisation. We value the contribution of students/apprentices and commit to engaging with students in meaningful ways to inform future developments, strategy and operational management.



SUMMARY OF THE KEY PERFORMANCE MEASURES FOR THE 2021/22 – 2023/24 OBJECTIVES:

Performance Indicators:

- NSS “Overall Satisfaction” to be in the top quartile.
- Continuation, Completion and Progression data in line with the National Average and above OfS minimum numerical thresholds for all students and apprentices.
- To embed the Universal Design for Learning Framework across all programmes ensuring alternative assessments are available and that the use of lecture capture is effective for students and technology is used to support learning.

6. To ensure that UCW and the West of England Institute of Technology can design and award programmes using existing partnerships where feasible and prompt solutions can be achieved.

UCW is ambitious and will continue to work with our partners and stakeholders to explore the potential to becoming a University for the region of North Somerset. With the opportunities within the sector and evolving landscape of higher technical qualifications UCW wants to be able to be agile to respond to learner and employer priorities. This will mean looking at how we can strengthen our position to be more autonomous and our ability to create our own programmes within the timescale of the next planning period.

- To increase the intake by 100 additional learners annually by 2023/24.
- To increase internal progression by 5% over the period of the plan.
- Evidence outstanding quality features to retain TEF award.
- Achieve Ofsted grade of at least Good.
- Develop a minimum of 2 new programmes a year.
- NSS Results for “Teaching on my course” and “Learning Opportunities” remain above average, with “Overall Satisfaction” in the top quartile.
- Continuation, Completion and Progression data exceeds OfS minimum numerical thresholds for all students and apprentices.
- To embed the Universal Design for Learning Framework across all programmes ensuring alternative assessments are available and that the use of lecture capture is effective for students and technology is used to support learning.
- To bring additional efficiencies and improved learner experience by ensuring programmes are designed and revalidated to enable modules in related areas to be jointly delivered.



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