

Corporate & Participation Plan 2023



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Acquire Learning College Ltd
Authored by: Aqib Aziz

CORPORATE & PARTICIPATION PLAN 2023

In January 2023, the Senior Management Group of Acquire Learning College Ltd conducted a review of the structure, stability, opportunities, and growth potential that was evident at the beginning of a new year. This, added to the increased patterns of demand being reported through our student engagement team, led to a unanimous recognition that the time was right to plan an expansion into higher education.

To achieve this ambition, it has been decided to seek collaborative partnerships with a small number of carefully selected universities and/or other Higher Education Institutions, using, where appropriate, both Franchise and Validation agreements.

In order to move this forward as quickly as possible, the College has recruited a number of new staff with wide experience of HE in FE Collaborative Partnerships and will be using their expertise to engage in discussions and negotiations with our potential partners, and to open this process as soon as is both practicable and possible.

Our further education programmes (including HNC and HND programmes) will continue, and will continue to grow, under the auspices of the current Acquire Learning College Ltd banner. However, in order to provide a more synchronous alignment of our HE programmes, we will create an operationally separate College of Higher Education, one more in keeping with the ethos, activity, and ambition of an institution determined to provide an appropriate high-quality environment that will meet the needs and aspirations of many generations of learners.

Introduction and Background

1. This section provides a brief introduction to the organisation, its history, its structure, and its governance.
2. Mission, Vision, and Values – This section is designed to show who we are, what we are, what we believe, and what we hope to achieve. It is, if you like, a glimpse into our ‘soul’. An insight into the forces and beliefs that drive us, and that give rise to this plan.
3. Participation and Aspiration – This final section outlines our immediate ambitions and our future aspirations.

1. Introduction and Background

This section provides a brief introduction to the organisation, its history, its structure, and its governance.

Our organisation came into existence 7 years ago, essentially as a private college working broadly in the field of cosmetic surgery and subjects related to medicine. Over the intervening years there was a range of provision that spread from Entry Level to Level 7, with most qualifications being either privately validated, or from overseas awarding bodies.

With the arrival of the current executive, the emphasis has been changed to a focus on publicly funded qualifications within the UK. These have reflected response to demand in Business Studies, and a working relationship with The British Academy of Jewellery. Both areas have grown rapidly and considerably.

We anticipate some 200 learners, mainly at Level 4, and our September intake will see this rise to around 300, and with a healthy intake of students at Level 3 to ensure strong future progression internally. During the organisation’s lifetime it has changed its identity in order to capture and reflect the ‘culture’ within which it operates.

The advent of mainstream, degree-level provision in the future will necessitate another change of identity in order to more accurately reflect the level of provision, and to align with the intentions and aspirations of our future student target.

In preparation for the (anticipated) arrival of degree students there have been changes in our policies, structure, and governance. All of these designed to facilitate the operation of a high-quality prospectus, providing an appropriate organisational environment to manage the provision with both efficiency and efficacy. New 'HE appropriate' policies and procedures are in place, staff have been recruited who bring experience and expertise in delivering high quality teaching (and research), and structures of management and governance have been established to ensure that there is strong oversight of the day-to-day management of delivery, and rapidity of response to the demands of high levels of support needed to meet the needs of learners and staff.

An Organisation Chart is provided as an appendix to the main document.

Mission, Vision, and Values

This section is designed to show who we are, what we are, what we believe, and what we hope to achieve. It is, if you like, a glimpse into our 'soul'. An insight into the forces and beliefs that drive us, and that give rise to this plan.

The Mission, Vision, and Value statements that follow are an attempt to describe our stance in relation to the task that we have set ourselves. We intend to establish a first-class, high-quality college of higher education that is unrivalled in the sector.

Working in partnership with only carefully selected universities, we hope to deliver a selection of their degree programmes, and to do so with excellence as our byword. Whilst being open to all suitably qualified learners, we make no secret of our desire to widen access to learners in significantly under-represented communities – to many bright and able potential learners who, for a variety of reasons, have become disengaged with the learning process. Often this is because of profoundly negative familial and societal pressures, combined with a catalogue of disadvantages that act to

disengage and disempower so many people. They represent a great loss to society as a whole, and a devastating violation of the life chances that should lay open before every member of our society – but do not.

In articulating the following statements, we openly acknowledge that the very language used intimates an expression of the true passion with which we approach the tasks ahead of us. We can only hope that it is apparent in our actions, and in the determination we have to guarantee that our learners are always supported with the very best resources available, and that we do everything in our power to help them realise their dreams of higher educational achievement.

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to attract and recruit a diverse range of learners from all communities throughout the UK and beyond. We are particularly committed to the provision of higher educational opportunities to disengage learners from under-represented communities and groups. Many such enclaves of disadvantage exist for reasons such as ethnicity, social class, social exclusion, and broad levels of cultural and educational deprivation.

We believe that such communities represent a vast, untapped academic and professional potential, which, if they can be encouraged to participate in an advanced learning journey, they can make a significant contribution to every aspect of daily life in a modern post-industrial society.

To achieve this, we will:

- Collaborate with a number of carefully selected University Partners in order to design and deliver a range of career-focused degree programmes that will meet the needs of individual learners.
- Provide qualifications which will equip learners with the knowledge, skill and commitment required to meet the needs of social and corporate organisations in local, regional and national communities.

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- Strive to provide all learners with the highest quality of learning available. This will be reflected in our provision of outstanding facilities, learning environment, curriculum, teaching and support staff.
 - Ensure that the student experience throughout the learning journey is always fully supported, and that student welfare remains paramount.
 - Remain sensitive to the needs of learners from non-traditional backgrounds, and those re-engaging with learning, recognising that previous disadvantage may have eroded levels of self-confidence and self-esteem.
 - Engage in partnerships with local employers to provide appropriate opportunities for work placements, active research, and opportunities to engage the wider community in supporting social, academic and professional activity.

OUR VISION

Our vision is to be instrumental in developing a growing number of highly motivated learners capable of achieving the qualifications, experience, and aspirations to optimise their existing and future educational status.

- We envisage that the learning journey with us will help each individual learner to achieve a well-rounded balance between advanced educational success, social, emotional, and spiritual growth and increased self-confidence.
- Access to a wide range of graduate level career opportunities, and
- Opportunities to participate more widely in the life and activity of the communities within which they live and work.

We believe that this can be achieved through the provision of higher education qualifications that are appropriate, accessible and affordable. Our intention is to ensure that every learner will enjoy the social, cultural and educational benefits available to learners in comparable Institutions throughout the higher education sector.

OUR VALUES

What we believe, the things we value most, are the things that define and shape who we are, and, perhaps more importantly, how we engage with the world around us.

At an individual level it would be impossible to estimate the sum total of all of our collective values, beliefs and ethical positions. It is probably nearly as difficult to do so for corporate bodies and organisations. However, such corporate bodies can identify a set of values that all of its members subscribe to, hold to be good and true and which can become the moral drivers that legitimize our best efforts at holding to our principles, working to ensure that every single student we have will reach their optimal achievements academically, professionally, and personally.

Our four overarching values are:

1. Equality of Access

We believe that it is the inalienable right of all our citizens to have access to lifelong learning opportunities at levels appropriate to their abilities, needs and desires.

Research has shown us that there are large numbers of people who are disengaged with the lifelong learning process, and for whom that disengagement can be disempowering, can lower their self-esteem, and can have a deeply negative impact on their personality, their relationships, and their career opportunities.

Unfortunately, there are many reasons for the continuing disadvantage experienced by such disengaged learners. Often, they are members of almost disenfranchised groups within society, disbarred or discouraged from higher education by dint of ethnicity, social class, perceived behaviour, negative stereotypes and many other negative influences. The disconnect between such disadvantaged groups is nothing short of scandalous, and the degree of under-representation becomes a double-edged sword. Statistics which identify the challenges and opportunities inherent in under-represented groups are glibly used as evidence that they are not suited to higher education, the low numbers being used to confirm their unsuitability – a truly sad example of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

It is our contention that such disadvantaged groups represent a vast pool of potential talent, and that every possible effort should be made to attract and recruit learners from these groups into higher education, and every necessary support should be in place to support them through the learning journey. It is not only a moral imperative that they be given access to the same rich and fulfilling educational journey as the most advantaged in our society, but it is also good for society to facilitate the release of the creative energy that these learners represent when equipped to contribute to the wider academic and professional possibilities that await them.

We are mindful that we should be careful not to compound the perception of 'differences' exhibited by disadvantaged groups. Should we make the mistake of having such solid majorities of such learners, we could all too easily create 'ghettos' of disadvantage that would be equally as harmful as the stereotyping that already exists. In order to combat this possibility, we recognise the need to recruit and enrol a wide spectrum of students within which groups of disadvantaged learners are assimilated in a healthy balance.

2. Primacy of the Learning Journey

The management and operation of any college, particularly those involved in the provision of world-class higher education, is complex and challenging. There exists a plethora of challenging tasks, duties, and responsibilities covering every aspect of the organisation's operations. In facing these responsibilities, it is both necessary and important, in our view, to establish a clear balance between the demands of organisational management and the needs of the learning body. Nothing, in our view, is as important as the quality of the learning journey undertaken by all of our students. The welfare of each student is paramount in our thinking, and the primacy of the learning journey is nothing short of sacrosanct.

Our belief is that we have a moral duty to ensure that every learner is supported in every way through their journey in higher education. In addition to being fully supported in terms of materials, facilities, and welfare, we have a responsibility to their minds.

If we fail to provide an academic environment that provides stimulation, encourages curiosity, and values creativity, we fail in the most unacceptable way.

It is our responsibility to provide outstanding tutors, first class library facilities, excellent teaching resources, and unparalleled support mechanisms. And, whatever the demands of running a complex modern organisation are, nothing is more important than fulfilling that brief. The primacy of the learning journey is and must remain supreme – it is the very *r’aison detre* of our existence as an educational organisation.

3. Valuing People

Our third core value is the recognition that people matter – and that they all have value and should be valued. It is said that approximately 70% of every corporate budget is spent on wages and salaries – in other words, on people. By simple mathematics it is an inescapable conclusion that people are, or should be, seen as the most important asset any company has. Therefore, the most valuable. Around 100% of the (arguably inadequate) student funding is spent on the education of the students. It goes without question that this makes them the most valuable asset to the college or university involved.

But it is not merely a fiscal imperative that makes people valuable. Their value is inherent and intrinsic. Despite a global population in excess of six billion, each individual is unique – a unique amalgam of skills, abilities, emotions, and personality traits – and, as such, each individual deserves to have their individuality and personhood recognised and respected.

We are therefore committed to providing a safe community, within which everyone, irrespective of role, rank or position will be treated with respect and dignity, and where all will be treated fairly and given equality of access at all levels. Everyone will be allowed to have their voice, and given the opportunity to share their hopes, fears, and concerns in the complex discourse of the academic community. All individuals will have the right of inclusion in the life of the community and will have an entitlement to the full range of support and services available at all times.

4. Aspiration and Excellence

If our new College of Higher Education was seeking a new tag line to its logo, we could do little better than *'Intentum stellis'* – 'Always aim for the stars'.

We seek to be an aspirational community – and this will always be foremost in our corporate thinking. Our aim is to be a community of scholarship, one characterised by intellectual curiosity, creativity and a sense of excitement at the pursuit of knowledge. We cannot overvalue academic excellence, and we will do everything in our power to stimulate a similar sentiment in the hearts and minds of all of our staff and students. There must never come a point where we think 'we know enough', or where we believe we have found the limits of our reach. That the stars seem beyond us is no reason to stop aiming for them, always.

Of all the things we hope to become noted for, none is as significant as our desire to become known as an aspirational community, a place of true scholastic endeavour, and a place where anything short of excellence is to settle for less than we are capable of.

PARTICIPATION AND GROWTH 2023 - forward

The present situation can only be described as healthy. Acquire Learning College has some 200 students currently studying on HNC (Level 4) with anticipation of progression onto Level 5. In addition, there are over 300 students at various stages of the Level 3 Diploma, thus ensuring healthy progression in the next two years, even without further marketing and recruitment.

It is this healthy situation, and the concomitant confidence it brings, that inspires us to seek this collaborative partnership with a number of carefully selected University Partners.

Our application is based initially on delivering the highly popular BA (Hons) Business Management degree, and our conservative projections are for intakes as follows:

2024 (if not earlier)	500
2025/26	950 (Two Years combined)
2026/27	1355 (Three Years combined)

Planned Growth

We have researched potential markets and matched those with planned growth in our delivery capacity, and, in addition to our main Sheffield Campus, we would want to make a strong case for growth in two respects.

1. Location

Our research shows that the suitability of all critical factors is optimal in the following locations:

- a) Stoke on Trent – which is central to an area bounded by Manchester, Birmingham, Burton on Trent and Derby.
- b) Leicester – the fastest growing city in the East Midlands, and one where we have strong existing connections within the community.
- d) Coventry – in alignment with LTU’s strategic vision.

2. Degree Provision

We hope to make a strong case to add the following degrees in the future:

BA (Hons) Business Management – Level 6 Top-up Degree

BA (Hons) Adult Nursing

BSc (Hons) Health & Social Care with Foundation Year

BA (Hons) Philosophy, Ethics, and Religion with Foundation Year

LLB (Hons) Law with Foundation Year

These programmes are our priority, given reports that there are currently c250,000 unfilled vacancies across the Nursing and Social Care Sector.

Student Destinations and Employability

We have built strong ties with employers over a number of years, through networking and upskilling of staff. This has created a strong progression route for the employability of our future graduates. We also have effective ties with local job centres and can guide learners into employment within well-established organisations. The emphasis on graduate employability will, we hope, become an important aspect of our identity.

In terms of Knowledge and Excellence, we aspire to stimulate keen scholarship and the pursuit of academic excellence by providing the highest standards of teaching, learning and research and by continuously improving our performance. And, where opportunity arises, to build viable links between our students and a range of occupational choices that are a seamless progression from study to application.

In keeping with the ethos and philosophy of all major providers of higher education, we are committed to the promotion of the principles of dignity, respect, social justice, equality and inclusion to support the social and economic health and wellbeing of each and every person in our college community.

We believe that by working together with a philosophy of openness and respectfulness we can ensure the core values and mission of our collaborative partners will become the lived experience of each and every member of our learning community. In our approach to supporting all of our learners to benefit optimally from their journey with us,

- We seek to be diverse and inclusive – supporting individuals and groups to fulfil their potential.
- We strive to be outward-looking, welcoming and open to new ideas.
- We seek to harness different viewpoints and perspectives to benefit individual and community wellbeing and enrich our research and scholarship.
- We value and respect the perspectives and contributions of all our colleagues and students.
- We shall create an enriched environment based on values of dignity and respect where diversity of culture, heritage and lifestyle is positively valued and which helps our people to thrive and to realise their full potential.

This, for us, is a seminal positional statement, and one that is almost a mirror image of our own articulated values, and those of potential collaborative partners we may work with.

We are also fully committed to reducing our environmental impact through our business activities.

We are incorporating sound environmental and sustainability management policies and practices, which will include continually improving aspects of both performance and delivery as an integral part of our corporate strategy and operating procedures.

We regularly review our policy and are currently updating it to reflect the challenges of climate change and our commitments in line with local and global sustainability challenges.

CONCLUSION

We submit this document being more than ever convinced that in seeking a partnership with a number of carefully selected University Partners, we are making the right choice, and in the belief that, if we are successful in our application, it will be the beginning of a long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationship.

Aqib Aziz
27th April 2023

