



Further Education Provision in Southampton

Context and Performance

January 2024

1. Preface

This document was first prepared three years ago following a challenge from a previous incarnation of the Scrutiny Panel. The colleges and school sixth forms questioned the validity of using the Performance Table information for a number of reasons, and eventually the Chair asked what measures should be used.

The three colleges worked together to offer a context for post 16 provision in the city, which is unusual for a number of reasons, alongside a set of measures that they use to judge the effectiveness of provision.

The Scrutiny Panel has returned to consideration of post 16 provision, as the impact of the pandemic upon data starts to lessen (but not cease). As such the contextual information has been updated, but data around performance has only been included where available. This is because validated achievement rate information is produced later in the academic year, while value added information is yet to recalibrate following the pandemic.

2. Introduction

The last twenty years have seen a drift of learners out of the city, both at Year 7 and at post-16. This drift accelerated in recent years at post-16, with the most able cohort specifically targeted by competitors outside of the city, assisted by an inspection regime that graded all three institutions as 'Requires Improvement' in 2017, and a funding system that rewards colleges for growth, irrespective of how they are meeting the needs of the geographical areas they are recruiting from.

While this drift has been arrested to an extent, with Richard Taunton and Itchen graded by Ofsted as 'Good' since 2021 (City College are awaiting inspection having become part of the South Hampshire Colleges Group), the impact has been to reduce Level 3 provision in the city, creating greater competition for school leavers, and generating longer journeys around and out of the city that is counter-productive and does not meet a 'green city' aspiration.

Recruiting more able students makes sense for all colleges. Such students are likely to achieve higher grade results and are more likely to remain in learning during their college career. They are more likely to have strong parental support and facilities and equipment to allow study at home. They are less likely to draw upon the support services colleges need to put in place, following withdrawal of such support by the NHS. However, where the high grade students are clustered in fewer colleges, this provides a major challenge to the city colleges which are all comprehensive and were founded on the basis of 'open access' and inclusion, with all three offering a range of courses at different levels to properly serve the community.

This data is shared to offer an insight into the context each college is operating in, and explain some of the measures that are used to judge performance at 16-18. These measures do not include the performance table judgements that allow comparison between local authority areas, and the reasons for this are highlighted below. It is hoped that a richer conversation employing a range of measures that better reflect the overall performance of post 16 provision may result in future years.

Please note all the data below relates to young people at the colleges, and not adult provision. City College served c1000 adult learners in 2022/23 through its own provision, and Richard Taunton 149. Itchen College partnered with both City College and Richard Taunton to offer courses to c900. Provision in all three colleges included courses aimed at the unemployed, sector specific training for those returning to the job market, ESOL and refugees, alongside more traditional adult education.

3. Contextual Information

a. Performance at Key Stage 4 in Southampton Schools

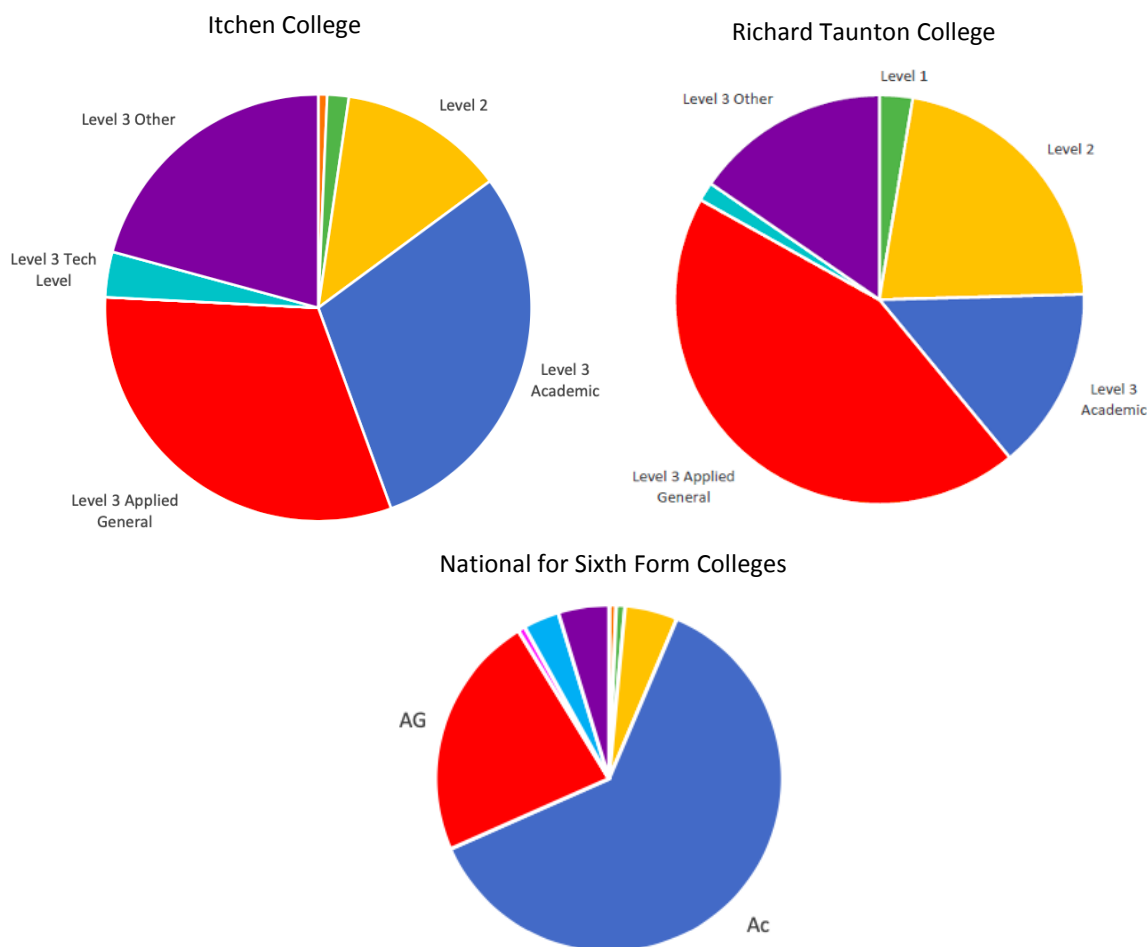
Performance in secondary schools in Southampton varies, with each school affected by its own context and patterns of deprivation across the city. This in turn drives the curriculum offer in each school, with many appropriately prioritising the needs of their students in preference to a curriculum offer that neatly matches the DFE performance tables. Both attainment and attendance are below the national average, and this is reflected in the intake of students in post 16 provision in the city.

Recruitment and retention of teachers in secondary schools has a knock-on impact upon attainment, and on progression on certain courses. If a school is struggling to recruit teachers in maths and science, this is likely to mean fewer students wishing to study these subjects at a higher level.

This impact is felt more strongly in post 16 institutions that depend upon recruitment from Southampton schools, but recruitment and retention of teachers is a nationwide issue, and is as likely to have an impact upon neighbouring Hampshire schools.

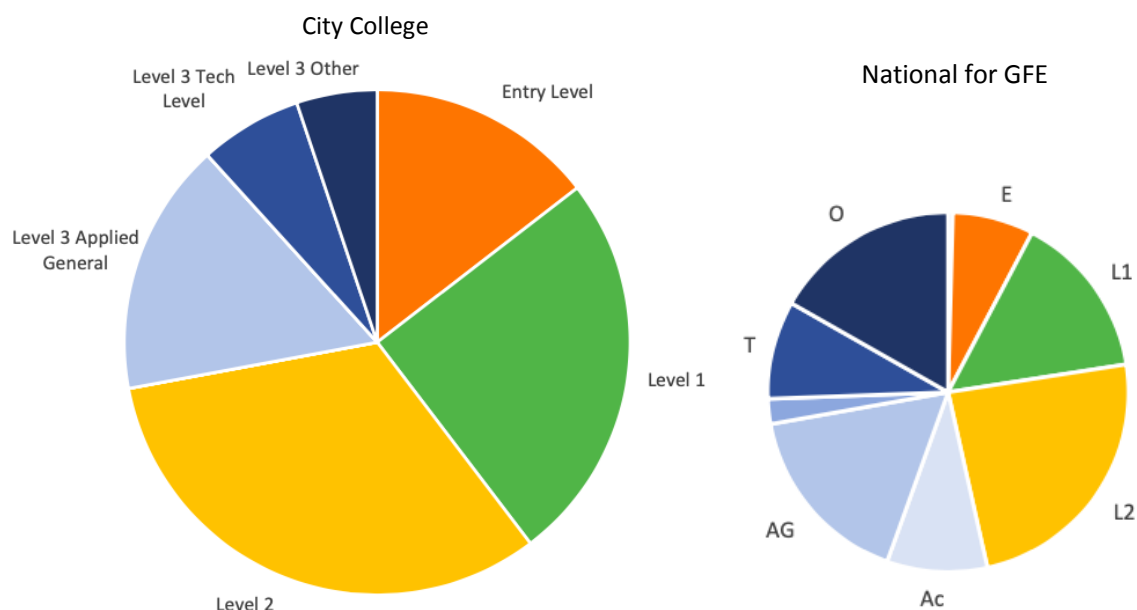
b. Profile of 16-19 Learners (Level of Study by Core Aim) 2022/23:

The mix of provision at Richard Taunton and Itchen are similar, and a significant minority of students will be undertaking programmes that mix courses at Level 2 and 3, with some students on GCSE re-sit (maths or English) alongside a Level 3 course or courses. The charts below represent the highest level of study a student undertakes.



For both sixth form colleges the proportion of students studying at Level 3 is significantly different to the national average, especially at 'Level 3 Academic', with this disparity even more pronounced when compared to providers in the South East region.

For City College the mix of provision is different with a greater proportion at Level 1 and 2, but it should be noted that for technical / vocational courses a student will be expected to start at Level 1 irrespective of GCSE profile, building skills to enable progression to a higher level of study. City College also has c300 apprentices currently in training at Level 2 and Level 3, who are not included in this chart.



Provision at City College sees a far higher proportion of students studying at Entry, Level 1 and Level 2 compared to the national average for General Further Education colleges.

c. English and maths prior achievement:

All three colleges are characterised by fewer students on entry having achieved a grade 4 in maths and English compared to national averages (NA) for sixth form colleges and GFE:

% of 16-18 students with GCSE 4+ in both, maths only, English only or neither	2022/23							
	Both	NA	Maths only	NA	English only	NA	Neither	NA
Richard Taunton College	62%	88%	7%	2%	15%	6%	16%	4%
Itchen College	71%	88%	4%	2%	13%	6%	12%	4%
City College	22%	53%	6%	6%	11%	15%	61%	26%

It should be noted that all three colleges have seen a significant increase in students without grade 4 in Maths and English this academic year, due to the government decision to return to normal grade boundaries, with no mitigation for the impact of the pandemic.

To illustrate this increase, using Itchen as an example:

	2022/23	2023/24	% increase
Maths GCSE + Functional Skills	346+49 = 395	495+41 = 536	+36%
English GCSE + Functional Skills	184+28 = 212	282+126 = 408	+92%

d. Deprivation 2022/23:

83% of students at City College come from households located in the most deprived parts of Southampton (IMD Bands 1 to 4 against city population of 67%). This difference is most pronounced at IMD Bands 1 and 2, with 51.6% of learners falling into these categories compared to 36.3% across the city.

At Itchen it is a slightly different picture with more 16-18 learners clustered in the middle bands, but 74.1% of learners in the most deprived parts and only 6% from the more advantaged areas (Bands 7-10, against city average of 16.1%).

At Richard Taunton, 62.6% of learners come from within the lowest 4 IMD bands (with 36% of learners falling into the IMD Bands 1 and 2) and 21% from the highest 4, which is the closest aligned out of the three colleges to the city's overall profile.

There is a direct correlation between disadvantage /deprivation and attainment at post 16. A study by the Education Policy Institute has seen the 'disadvantage gap' widen by almost a third of a grade since 2019, meaning that on average a disadvantaged student (defined as accessing free school meals during their education) achieved between three and four grades lower than a non-disadvantaged student (source: <https://epi.org.uk/disadvantage-16-19/>).

4. Performance Tables

Measures used in the government Key Stage 5 performance tables do not adequately report the performance of the three colleges because of the provision mix above. However, these are the only measures that allow the city council to compare the performance of the city against other local authority areas, creating interesting dialogue at the annual Scrutiny Panel meetings. The aggregated headline performance table measures (which includes data from St Anne's and Bitterne Park) see Southampton amongst the worst performing local authority areas for Key Stage 5.

However, a measure that looks at the number of students achieving three A levels at a certain grade pre-supposes that the majority of students will be undertaking an exclusive A level programme. A significant minority of students at Itchen and Richard Taunton are on mixed programmes, incorporating at least one applied general course with an A level, thus excluding them from this measure. Similarly points score per student is a measure of volume of programme at A level and, indirectly, prior achievement at GCSE, not necessarily of quality of provision or distance travelled. With regard to prior achievement at GCSE, learners on Level 3 programmes at Richard Taunton and Itchen tend to arrive with a GCSE profile at least half a grade lower than the national average, and a full grade lower than other colleges in the Hampshire area.

For vocational courses, performance tables exclude some BTECs and other technical vocational courses that are the specialism of City College and only 62 of c1100 16-19 learners were included in the last performance tables across three different measures. For Itchen and Richard Taunton it is a similar picture with 264/402 students from Itchen and 149/270 from Richard Taunton included in the 'Applied General' measure.

5. Alternative Performance Measures

a. Achievement Rates

Achievement rates are the main way post-16 provision in colleges is scrutinised by the DFE Post 16 Team, the FE Commissioner Team and Ofsted. This is the measure colleges are asked to use when considering how to self-assess performance, although the more recent inspection framework moves towards a more holistic judgement.

In essence achievement rates are the percentage of students that pass the qualification they started, including all those that dropped out or did otherwise not complete: $\text{Achievement} = \text{Pass Rate} \times \text{Retention}$.

Achievement rates are publicly available and published by the DFE in January/February for the year previous. When published they allow comparison to national averages for sixth form colleges (Itchen and Richard Taunton) and for GFEs (City College).

b. Value added and measures of progress at Level 3

These measures look at the progress made post-16, specifically comparing GCSE outcomes to performance on post 16 courses. There are a number of systems that colleges can buy into, and a newer DFE measure that appeared before the interruption of the pandemic. This is a relevant method of assessment for Itchen College and Richard Taunton College and the school sixth forms, but is not appropriate for City College (value added is not calculable for the majority of technical courses or for Level 2 and Level 1 programmes).

However good value added can be prioritised over achievement, just as pass rates can be prioritised over retention. A more cynical provider with a high volume of learners may ask a student to leave or drop a subject if it looks as though their likely result would not contribute to value added performance, or may hit pass rates. Similarly, students can be counselled off courses at the end of their first year.

The Advanced Level Performance system (ALPs) provides a contextual score of progress made from Key stage 4 on a scale of 1-9 where 5 is "satisfactory to good" and 1 is equivalent to the best performing institution in the previous year. Although it is a system that is 'bought in', it is used by the vast majority of sixth form colleges and by GFEs with similar provision, as well as a growing number of school sixth forms. It broadly follows the newer measure of progress introduced by the government, which offers a score, positive or negative to indicate performance compared to the national average outcome.

Both ALPs and the DFE measure are currently deemed unreliable due to the impact of the pandemic, and the DFE measures will not be published this year. This is due to the potential inflation of GCSE results due to the Teacher Assessed Grade and Centre Assessed Grade processes that were used to determine GCSE grades in 2020 and 2021, resulting in students achieving grades that may have been higher than if they had sat regular exams.

c. English and Maths progress

Students who did not achieve between grade 4 and 9 at GCSE in maths and English are required to study and retake the GCSE up to their 18th birthday. Progress is measured by comparing the result of their resit to their previous grade (for example a student who had achieved a Grade 3 and now achieves a Grade 4 has progress of 1; a student who achieves a Grade 3 and then another Grade 3 has made 0 progress).

Level 2 Progress – English (from grade 3)	2022/23	All Colleges
Richard Taunton College	0.08	-0.25
Itchen College	0.44	
City College	-0.4	
Level 2 Progress – English (from grade 2)	2022/23	All Colleges
Richard Taunton College	0.20	0.01
Itchen College	1.06	
City College	-0.29	
Level 2 Progress - Mathematics (from grade 3)	2022/23	All Colleges
Richard Taunton College	-0.01	-0.31
Itchen College	0.06	
City College	-0.33	
Level 2 Progress - Mathematics (from grade 2)	2022/23	All Colleges
Richard Taunton College	-0.05	-0.19
Itchen College	0.05	
City College	-0.14	

As previously noted, all three colleges have seen a significant increase in students without grade 4 in Maths and English this academic year, due to the government decision to return to normal grade boundaries, with no mitigation for the impact of the pandemic.

d. Progression

Successful progression is a key indicator of effective provision, but there is no reliable national system to report this across the full range of provision.

The table below shows progression to HE of Level 3 leavers (% of students on UCAS points bearing courses who went on to study at an HE institution through UCAS):

Richard Taunton College	37%
Itchen College	53%
City College*	56%

* Intended destination, not actual at this stage

This is only part of the story, as for City College many of those achieving on Level 3 courses will proceed direct to the workplace, which is a better measure of success on this type of vocational course. National data regarding internal progression across levels of study sees City College broadly in line.

Southampton is an historical ‘cold spot’ regarding participation in HE, but the colleges are starting to gain traction in this regard. For example, Itchen saw 64% of students with university places coming from areas within the two lowest participation quintiles, compared to 29% nationally. The same measures for Richard Taunton sees 55% from these areas.

6. Shared Challenges

Recent increases in core funding have not yet made good the decline in funding experienced by FE since 2010. Despite funding having improved over the last two years, FE is still 15% worse off in real terms compared to 2010. This difference is even greater when considering adult education provision.

A key impact of the pandemic for all education sectors is a change of public attitude towards attendance, and all post 16 institutions are not yet at pre-pandemic attendance levels. Post 16 does not have the statutory powers of schools in this regard, with the ultimate sanction being withdrawal from a course, which is entirely counter-productive.

This impact is more pronounced when educating a mix of students across levels, with attendance on Level 1 and 2 courses likely to be less strong than Level 3. The reality for many students on some lower level courses is their perception of having 'failed' to achieve the required standard for Level 3, affecting their motivation and resilience. This is further compounded by the withdrawal of NHS specialist support around mental health and wellbeing, placing a further burden upon schools and colleges to fund this support themselves.

Latest destinations data shows the drift of learners out of the city has slowed, but remains a significant challenge, especially in the west of the city. The key aspect of this challenge is retention of provision, given the difficulty of sustaining courses with very low numbers. If a course is stopped there is a reduction of choice for students, meaning some are compelled to look further afield for their post 16 education, if they can afford to do so.

Curriculum change across the post 16 sector will have a future impact, with many popular general vocational courses facing de-funding to stimulate demand for the new T Level qualifications. Richard Taunton and Itchen have begun first delivery of these new courses, City College will begin delivery in 2024. T Levels have different demands to the courses they have replaced, including a substantial examined element and work placement.

T Levels are larger qualifications than previous courses, with higher entry requirements, and in some cases they will restrict provision. The best example of this is the end of courses relating to Travel and Tourism, an essential skills need in the local area, but with no T Level equivalent. Similarly, Criminology and Uniformed Public Services are facing conclusion, both popular areas of study. This restriction of choice when combined with higher entry requirements could lead to an increase in the NEET population within the city, although the colleges will work collaboratively to ensure this risk is minimised.