Internal Audit Report – Key Performance Indicator 2 - Progression

City’s Vision & Strategy 2026 designates student progression as one of four academic output KPIs alongside student satisfaction, employability and the proportion of staff producing 3*/4* research. Measures of student progression are included in most UK university league tables and provide a core metric in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

Internal Audit have completed a review of City’s performance against Key Performance Indicator 2: Progression (90% average across all undergraduate programmes)

The attached report is provided to Educational Quality Committee for information.

Recommended action

Educational Quality Committee is asked to:

- to note the report

Publication: Closed
To: Professor Bolton
From: Director of Internal Audit
Date: October 2018

Subject: Key Performance Indicator 2: Progression (90% average across all undergraduate programmes)

1 Introduction

1.1 For 2018/19, the internal audit plan includes days for the review of action plans to address underperforming PIs and KPIs.

1.2 City’s Vision & Strategy 2026 designates student progression as one of four academic output KPIs alongside student satisfaction, employability and the proportion of staff producing 3*/4* research. Measures of student progression are included in most UK university league tables and provide a core metric in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

1.3 City’s KPI measures progression as the proportion of first year, full time, first degree students eligible to progress to the second year¹. This is a different metric from those used in the Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide (GUG) rankings and in the TEF. The GUG metric represents the proportion of full time, first degree students projected to complete their courses at City or another institution at some point in the future, whilst the TEF metric considers actual progression of UK students to a second year at City or another provider, with data averaged over the most recent three academic years.

1.4 City’s metric is regarded as a reasonable proxy for the GUG and TEF metrics and was chosen for reasons of timeliness, with updated data available every November, ease of calculation and the ability to produce School and Programme level results.

1.5 City was ranked at 52rd (58th in 2018) in the Times and Sunday Times GUG 2019 with a completion rate of 87.2% (86.6 in 2018)².

1.6 City’s TEF progression rate is currently 87.8% against a benchmark of 92.3%. In the most recent TEF progression was the only area where City received negative flags for performance against its benchmark. Modelling indicates that achievement of City’s KPI of 90% would align City with the TEF benchmark. City would need to achieve 95% against its own KPI to secure a positive flag.

¹ First year, full time, first degree students eligible to progress to the second year Excludes transfers i.e. new students on the second year of a programme.

² Based on 2018 HESA projected outcomes data for the 2015-16 entrant cohort.
1.7 The next iteration of TEF will include subject-level evaluation and current modelling indicates that several City programmes are at risk of a bronze rating due to weaknesses in progression and other metrics.

1.8 City’s Institution-wide and School level performance against KPI 2 is shown in the following table:

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<td>Actual</td>
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<td>Plan</td>
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<tr>
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<td>77.5</td>
<td>83.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2 Terms of Reference

2.1 The audit sought to provide assurance that there are adequate and effective action plans in place to address causes of underperformance in progression and that these plans are regularly monitored.

2.2 The approach was to consider the following areas:

- Analysis of PI performance;
- Development of actions to address performance (University and School level);
- Monitoring and completion of actions; and
- Reporting of changes to PI.

2.3 Information was gathered through:

- Interviews with:
  - The Deputy President and Provost
  - Director of Student and Academic Services
  - Head of Student Experience and Engagement, Student and Academic Services
  - Progression and Strategy Support Manager, Student and Academic Services
  - Associate Dean Academic Quality and Standards, Cass Business School
  - Deputy Registrar, Cass Business School
  - Associate Dean Academic Programmes, The City Law School
  - Programme Director LLB, The City Law School
  - Associate Dean Education, School of Arts and Social Sciences
  - Associate Dean Student Experience, School of Arts and Social Sciences
  - Deputy Dean, School of Mathematics, Computer Science and Engineering
  - Associate Dean Education Excellence and Innovation, School of Health Sciences
- Reviewing relevant papers and minutes including those for:
2.4 The following is the written report addressing issues identified under the terms of reference as set out above.

3 Findings and observations

3.1 Analysis of PI Performance

Reasonable steps have been taken to understand performance relative to the KPI through detailed analysis of progression rates and contributing factors. This has included examining student progression data for correlations between entry qualifications or background and risk of non-progression together with extensive discussion involving members of the Executive Team, School Deans, Associate Deans, Programme Directors, Students' Union representatives and staff members from Student and Academic Services and Learning Enhancement and Development.

With a few exceptions the work on student data has not identified any clear correlation between entry requirements or background and progression, challenging widely held views that progression rates are largely attributable to admissions decisions. Subsequent discussions have instead highlighted issues around student engagement, assessment practice and timely access to appropriate support as far more significant to student success. This understanding of progression is reflected in Institution, School and Programme level plans although a focus on entry qualifications is still evident in some Annual Programme Evaluations (APEs) and programme KPI plans.

Reporting associated with the new Student Engagement and Attendance Policy will yield new data about the student experience and is expected to provide further insight into the factors influencing progression.

3.2 Development of actions to address performance (University and School level)

Actions have been planned and implemented at University, School and Programme level to address performance. These actions address issues identified through analysis and discussion of progression performance, for example, by being aimed at whole cohorts rather than specific groups, focussing on engagement throughout the year, seeking to identify problems early on and reviewing assessment regulations and practice. A paper to ExCo in February 2017 prioritised the following actions:

1. Implementation of a City-wide Personal Tutoring Policy.
2. Implementation of a City-wide Student Attendance and Engagement Monitoring Policy with an initial focus on monitoring personal tutoring and follow-up.

The paper also recommended the following additional actions:

University action

3. Expansion of the CityBuddies peer mentoring scheme, including offering a buddy relationship to every first year student as standard.
4. Assessment Strategies review – for example, to combat poor strategies across a programme and its modules leading to students needing to pass high numbers of discrete assessment components, and also to provide early assessments in modules especially in Stage 1 so as to identify students needing follow up and additional support early on.
University/ School action

5. Roll out of Peer Assisted Study Support scheme. Second and third year students provide guidance to first year students in programme/School context and with specific academic focus.

School action

6. Provision of summer revision sessions for students taking resits.
7. Schools to publish plans for all activities, interventions and communications for first year students. To cover what is offered, when and why.
8. Improved processes for identifying and intervening in modules where cohorts have been disadvantaged by poor assessment practice.
9. Specific multi-day pre-induction event to provide incoming students to specific programmes with early guidance, study skills and university experience in an academic setting. Possible to target to specific students’ needs and Schools’ contexts

Schools implemented the City-wide personal tutoring policy during 2017/18 and conducted manual monitoring of attendance and engagement, focusing on personal tutoring and follow-up. During the year Schools provided summary reports of attendance monitoring data to ExCo. The personal tutoring policy has been updated for 2018/19 and will be implemented alongside a new Student Engagement and Attendance Policy. Schools will continue to monitor and report attendance data to ExCo with two programmes piloting the use of attendance monitoring technology.

Schools have also engaged with the other recommended actions as evidenced through annual KPI action plans and APEs. This has included contributing to a City-wide assessment review project, offering peer-assisted study support, providing summer revision sessions for resits and enhanced induction events focusing on the transition to HE.

3.3 Monitoring and completion of actions

Actions that have been identified as priorities are being completed. Progress is monitored through annual KPI planning meetings between Programme staff and the Deputy President, the APE process, reporting to School ExCos and Boards of Studies and regular updates on key institution-wide initiatives to the ESC, EQC, Senate and ExCo.

Progression is a major item on the ExCo agenda with ExCo having overseen the development of Personal Tutoring and Student Engagement and Attendance Policies in 2017/18 and now receiving regular reports of attendance monitoring data.

SIPCco and Council have received reports and updates on City-wide and School level actions to improve progression.

Programme level KPI and APE processes currently operate in parallel with separate outputs and whilst some APE action plans incorporate actions from the KPI plan others do not. There is therefore potential for duplication or for actions to be overlooked in subsequent follow up. APE and KPI planning templates are currently under review with an aspiration to bring the processes together with KPI linked actions incorporated into a single action plan for a programme.

The review also noted that the KPI plans produced in 2017/18 did not specifically refer to actions agreed in the previous year. This was however only the second year of the KPI planning process with many actions being at a research or planning stage. As these actions move beyond initial research and planning to implementation it would be appropriate to include more specific tracking in the KPI process to support accountability and evaluation of impact.

3.4 Reporting of changes to PI

Changes in the Progression KPI are reported to the Executive Committee, SIPCco and Council in line with annual updates to the HESA data. Implementation of the Student Engagement and Attendance Monitoring Policy will generate more regular in-year data to signal possible changes in the KPI and prompt timely and targeted action where necessary.
3.5 Feedback on areas for further exploration

The review noted the following feedback from staff regarding areas or actions relevant to improving progression:

- **Internal transfers between programmes** – staff from two Schools suggested that it would be helpful to have a clear process for students to transfer to another City programme. It was accepted that this might not impact many students but in some cases could offer a better outcome than leaving City altogether. Some transfers were already being arranged following informal correspondence or conversations between departments but a more formal and transparent process would enable more students to be offered this option.

- **Approaches to student support** – analysis of student data and progression rates had highlighted changing student requirements, particularly with regards to personal support. There was a need to consider this in programme design and delivery but also to ensure academic staff were sufficiently equipped to deliver appropriate support. It would also be important to consider the scaling of City’s student support resources to accommodate current and future need.

- **Assessment Regulations** – concern was expressed that certain aspects of the regulations leave City students at a disadvantage compared to their peers at other Institutions. Rules concerning the trailing of credits into a subsequent year were cited as an example. It was believed that in some cases outward transfers of students to other HEIs were motivated by the potential to achieve a higher award through more favourable assessment requirements.

- **Transitioning to HE** – it was noted that for some students the marked contrast between their experiences of small groups and almost one-to-one teaching at A level and the larger group sizes at a University were an issue, particularly in quantitative subjects. There was a need to consider the implications of larger groups in terms of student access to support and also establishing community.

- **Exploring wider sector practice** – One School was actively engaging with other HEIs with similar intakes to City but stronger levels of progression for additional insight into effective practices.

- **Recognition of the significance of other initiatives beyond personal tutoring and attendance monitoring** – There was a concern that where personal tutoring and attendance monitoring were already well established, the City-wide emphasis on these areas had the potential to divert focus from other more locally relevant issues such as assessment strategies and induction events.

- **Culture** – It was acknowledged that efforts to improve progression require a wider change in culture to be successful and that this will take time. Change was already evident in many areas in the increased emphasis on timely and positive intervention to enable students to succeed rather than attributing poor progression rates to inappropriate admissions decisions. However it was also recognised that a focus on entry qualifications persists in some areas along with a perception that a certain level of non-progression is desirable as an indication of academic rigour.

3.6 Opportunities for further improvement

- **Integration of KPI and APE processes** – As noted above City is currently implementing parallel processes for programme evaluation and KPI action planning with scope for considerable duplication or for actions to be omitted from follow up work. Greater integration should help to address perceptions of inefficiency whilst ensuring that delivery against the KPIs is truly embedded in the operation of each programme.

- **Introduction of action tracking** – KPI action plans have to date focused on how Programme teams are engaging with Institution and School priorities and descriptions of programme-
specific initiatives to improve progression. The template does not directly refer to actions identified in the previous year and as such it is difficult to see whether Programme teams are doing what they said they would. 2018/19 will be the third year the KPI process has been running and it would be appropriate to incorporate more specific tracking of previously agreed actions.

- **KPIs and targets:** APE and KPI plan templates refer to progression targets and feedback during the review suggests that the 90% indicator is perceived as a target with some staff regarding it as ambitious and others questioning whether it is high enough. The review also noted that 90% is likely to be the minimum threshold for maintaining a silver TEF rating and an acceptable UK ranking. Differing perceptions of what the KPI means and what is expected of Schools and programmes suggest a need for further explanation of the KPI and the wider implications of progression rates below 90%.

If there are any queries, or you require further explanation of the findings above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Kind regards

Steve Stanbury
Director of Internal Audit