

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The City of Wolverhampton College Higher Education Strategy 2019-2022 sets out the direction of travel that will ensure we continue to deliver outstanding provision that is highly valued by our students and our communities as well as contributing positively to economic and cultural growth.
- 1.2 The strategy builds on our successes within Higher Education (HE) whilst ensuring the College continues to adapt to the changing needs of its environment at a local, regional, national and international level. Higher Education itself continues to change, in particular with the introduction of the Office for Students. There is also a national decline of HE enrolments both within universities and FE colleges which requires City of Wolverhampton College to review and revise our offer to ensure we are in a strong position to adapt to the changing market.
- 1.3 We have a strong and vibrant HE community with good success rates and student engagement. We embrace these changes as it provides further opportunities to build on our successes and for us to be even more responsive and transparent in our continued commitment to put students at the heart of all that we do.
- 1.4 In 2019, the Corporation reviewed the College’s Mission, Vision and Values looking to simplify the College’s approach to enable staff and external stakeholders to have a clear idea of the direction of travel proposed and also to show staff where they fit and how they contribute. The consensus was a need to simplify the way the College presents externally and internally. It also needed to be more specific and set out the overall USP. In doing this the College needed to clearly set out the Purpose (describing what we do) supported by our Values (how we do it).
- 1.5 The College therefore decided to focus on the Purpose and the Values in setting out the direction of travel for the next three years. The strategic framework, see appendix 1, was agreed.
- 1.6 After setting out the direction of travel for the College over the next 3 years, it was agreed to review each sector and the following 5 priorities were established in setting the direction of HE for the College:
- Priority One - Student Experience - Quality
 - Priority Two - Products
 - Priority Three - People
 - Priority Four - Promotion
 - Priority Five - Governance and Structure

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2. Background and Context

- 2.1 In Wolverhampton 19.5% of people hold a Level 4 qualification compared to 35% across England. 30,300 people in Wolverhampton hold a Level 4 so to match England, we need to increase the number of people achieving Level 4 to 52,953 – that’s 22,653 people to upskill.
- 2.2 Employment in knowledge driven occupations is above the national median for production activities and above the Black Country median for knowledge driven services. Employment in knowledge driven activity is growing, having increased by 7% between 2016 and 2018, placing Wolverhampton in the top 40% of districts nationally. However, due to low levels of educational attainment among residents of the City, non-resident commuters fill many of these jobs.
- 2.3 Professional occupations are predicted to have the most significant increase. Associate professional and technical will also increase along with Managers, Directors and Senior Officials and also the Caring, Leisure and other Service Sectors. This aligns to the apprenticeship delivery for the Black Country
- 2.4 The rise in professional occupations means that Wolverhampton needs to focus on upskilling its residents as currently Wolverhampton is an importer of employees at this level from neighbouring regions - the city does not produce enough highly skilled people to fill its vacancies. In the Black Country the College has a 9% market share of the HE in the FE market (2017/18) declining from the previous year which was 10%.
- 2.5 The College competes with other FE Colleges and Universities in the HE market. The College needs to grow its HE provision and has ambitious targets. There is capacity for growth in the HE market, both for full-time and part-time provision. In the Black Country (2017/18) there were 30170 studying at university (92% of the market share), an increase of over just over 1,000 people from the previous year.
- 2.6 HE in FE has many unique selling points over studying at university, and universities are very aware of this competition, as well as the competition amongst HEIs – marketing budgets at Universities increased by an average of 23% in 2016. Universities are set to become even more aggressive with their marketing as the impact of Brexit is felt with a decline in EU students.
- 2.7 The HE market is fiercely competitive and as a result, universities are giving unconditional offers more freely – in 2017, 113 universities in the UK gave over 1,000 unconditional offers per institution to young people. 32% of those young people missed the entry requirements by at least 3 grades. As a result of so many unconditional offers being given, 20,000 less students went through clearing in 2017, however overall recruitment was only down by 1%.

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- 2.8 This is a significant change which will impact the College’s HE applications and means the College must follow the same applications cycle to ensure the bulk of applications are received from September to March, with a swift response and unconditional offer given to the applicant. Less students applying through clearing means less ‘last minute’ students applying August-October – an audience the College has historically relied on.
- 2.9 To ensure the College is in a strong position to respond to the changes in the marketplace, along with the changing demographic, a priority for the College will be undertaking a thorough review of the products to determine what is fit for purpose, financially sustainable and resilient. In addition to this, the revised offer will need to be responsive to student requirements as well as the economic climate.

To ensure we achieve these, our key priorities will be to:

1. Facilitate a student experience, which is outstanding whereby students gain sustainable employment through the development of work and life skills including digital literacy.
2. Review and revise the current HE offer and provide products for students and employers that are consistently high quality and meet local and regional skills and education priorities in a sustainable way.
3. Ensure the deployment of our people provides leadership at all levels and develop the education, employer and community partnerships, which enhance and help grow the HE curriculum.
4. Ensure the promotion of our offer fully informs students, parents/carers, employers and local communities including progression and career opportunities.
5. Provide a Governance structure that facilitates effective management and oversight of the curriculum.

3. Priority One - Student Experience - Quality

- 3.1 Facilitate a student experience which is outstanding whereby students gain sustainable employment through the development of work and life skills including digital literacy.

This will be achieved through:

- Empowering students to make informed decisions in partnership with staff. This will facilitate students in taking responsibility for their learning, in a co-creation model, which recognises students and staff as equal partners that together create an academic community. This approach enables our students to be involved in planning their learning

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experience, stretching and challenging themselves and their peers, as well as those who teach them.

- The channelling of student feedback to further enhance the quality of the provision and draw on their experience and ideas that lead to change and development. This will initiate enhancement to their own and future students' experiences and will support the College to continuously innovate approaches to learning, teaching and assessment.
- Preparing graduates for a world where employment opportunities are dynamic and changing, where graduates may be required to bid for contracts, commissions and projects in a freelance capacity, and the ability to work effectively in teams to achieve common goals over a short timescale will be key to developing a successful career.

This will be outstanding when:

- The learning and teaching is judged excellent by our students.
- Students are stretched to achieve their highest possible grades in their awards so that they realise their potential academically and professionally.
- Students' views are channelled into decision making processes by the course teams with appropriate action set and monitored.
- Students engage with a range of Quality Assurance processes that lead to improvements and students participate in course development, including new course validation.
- The College and the Students Union work together to ensure that there is independent advice and support for students.

4. Priority Two - Products

- 4.1 Review and revise the current HE offer and provide products for students and employers that are consistently high quality and meet local and regional skills and education priorities in a sustainable way.

This will be achieved through:

- Curriculum developments being informed by national, international and local research into workforce trends, labour market intelligence, and developments in education and industry.
- Effectively working with validating partners to provide Masters level progression routes for our students.
- Building on curricula, that already have a strong reputation, are resilient and have unique selling points.
- Extending our network of industry specialists and employers who contribute to the design and delivery of HE programmes, ensuring sector relevance as well as securing skills for progression to employment for our graduates. This enables the College to meet local, regional, national and international employer needs for an appropriately skilled and qualified workforce.
- The further development of appropriate Higher Education routes, e.g. the extension of the

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HNC/D offer, Foundation Degrees, Higher Apprentices, alternative modes of study such as day release and distance learning and the development of part time provision to attract a wider demographic.

This will be outstanding when:

- Products are desirable and modes of delivery are flexible to meet employer and student requirements which leads to an increase in student recruitment.
- We build on the delivery of qualifications and skills appropriate to enter employment, progress to higher-level study, set up as freelance or start a new business. This will be reflected in strong progression to highly-skilled sector-specific employment.
- Facilities are maximised which in turn leads to growth within popular and successful curriculum areas.
- Employers and sector specialists participate in and contribute to curriculum in all areas of HE delivery including content design and input.

5. Priority Three – People

5.1 Ensure the deployment of our people provides leadership at all levels and develop the education, employer and community partnerships, which enhance and help grow the HE curriculum.

This will be achieved through:

- Recruiting leaders who deliver excellence and who are able to perform to the College’s high expectations.
- Ensuring course leadership is effective in delivering high quality education that contributes to an outstanding student experience.
- Providing opportunities for all HE teachers to undertake further research and scholarly activities.
- The extension of our academic network through the joint sharing of pedagogic research with other academics from other universities.
- Staff, who are themselves researchers and practitioners, work with students effectively to enable them to find things out for themselves and create original work.

This will be outstanding when:

- Strong and effective leadership at all levels leads to excellent outcomes for students.
- Staff maximise their strong industry experience and links to further enhance student experience.
- Teaching teams are skilled in creating curricula and pedagogies which suit the needs of their students and their sector.
- Staff are recognised internally and externally for the quality and reputation of their work. This includes staff undertaking research, scholarly activity and continual professional

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development which enhance the quality of the students' learning experiences.

6. Priority Four – Promotion

6.1 Ensure the promotion of our offer fully informs students, parents/carers, employers and local communities including progression, career opportunities and value for money. Growth, and therefore financial stability, will be supported by adopting a 'whole college' approach to marketing and recruitment which will include collaboration with widening participation and internal progression activities.

This will be achieved through:

- College staff (curriculum and support) seeing marketing and recruitment as a shared responsibility, are engaged with all recruitment activities and events and use every opportunity to positively promote the College.
- Targeted marketing activities and course teams providing engaging activities and excellent service for applicants at every point of contact.
- The continued development of vocational and academic routes from entry to higher levels that enables students to move through clear progression pathways, with a line of sight into employment.
- Ensuring the progression routes from Further Education to Higher Education are clearly mapped and communicated effectively to all stakeholders.
- Building on our partnerships with schools, other colleges and community partners to further open up access to education for more of our community and to lead new developments in widening participation with our Student Ambassadors.
- Through our dedicated widening participation team continue to build effective partnerships with schools, colleges, community organisations and care leaver teams offering impartial HE IAG and taster activities to students in our local community.
- Identifying specific courses which might attract a wider interest from international students and promote these to a wider market.
- Being transparent about our performance, this will include the publication of data, student completion and achievement outcomes.
- Ensuring our offer demonstrates good value for money through the quality of teaching, fair assessment and feedback and learning resources.

This will be outstanding when:

- Course teams co-create content and are proactive in generating leads and maximising marketing opportunities which leads to increased student recruitment.
- Conversion rate from application to enrolment across all markets and campuses increases by 3% year on year.
- Internal progression to Higher Education has improved by 20% year on year. Positive destinations into employment at least meets College KPI of 98%.

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- Targeted support for those individuals with protected characteristics and disabilities improves retention and achievement rates for students. Increased internal progression (FE to HE) for students who are under-represented in HE.

7. Priority Five - Governance and Structure

- 7.1 Provide a Governance structure that facilitates effective management and oversight of the curriculum.
- 7.2 The responsibility for the strategic direction of all College provision including HE lies with the Board of Governors. The College Executive Team is the body within the College with overall responsibility for the management of the academic standards and the quality of HE courses.
- 7.3 Member of the Executive Management Team (EMT) oversee business development, growth, research and partnership arrangements and academic affairs in addition to quality assurance processes and systems.
- 7.4 The Board of Governors regularly monitors the performance of HE provision through reports and key performance indicators.
- 7.5 The governance structure remains a crucial function for the College with accountability at all levels within the organisation. The structure ensures the Executive Management Team retain a clear line of sight on all matters related to HE from quality, recruitment and course approvals as well as shaping the priorities for HE, beyond this, the Board of Governors have final approval on the direction of HE and the overall strategy.
- 7.6 In addition to the internal governance infrastructure the College's maintenance of registration with the Government's Office for Students requires the adherence to the regulatory framework that is underpinned by the functions, duties and powers given to it in the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA). The regulatory framework sets out four objectives of which the College is assessed against by the Office for Students.
- 7.7 All students, from all backgrounds, and with the ability and desire to undertake higher education:
1. are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from, higher education;
 2. receive a high quality academic experience, and their interests are protected while they study or in the event of a provider, campus or course closure;
 3. are able to progress into employment or further study, and their qualifications hold their value over time;
 4. receive value for money.

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Appendix 1

PURPOSE: Defining Futures			
VALUES:			
	Student Engagement We value students		Student Success We value success & progression
	Business Success We value sustainable business		People Engagement We value role models

PURPOSE: Defining Futures			
4 KEY STRATEGIC KPIS:			
	Student Engagement Market Share %		Student Success Positive Student Destination %
	Business Success EBITDA (Earnings Before Interest, Tax, Depreciation & Amortisation) %		People Engagement Staff Engagement %