1 Introduction

Riverside College is a very successful Further Education College providing high quality vocational, technical and professional education and training. It has delivered higher education courses for over 20 years and currently offers higher national certificates and diplomas, foundation degrees and bachelor degrees across Engineering, Health and Social Care, Counselling, Sport, Computing and IT and Education. The College also offers the Certificate/Post Graduate Certificate in Education. The majority of students enrolled onto higher education programmes at Riverside College study on a part-time basis. Currently we have 63 full-time students and 208 part-time students who have chosen to study with us.

Riverside College has a long and established relationship with both Staffordshire University and Pearson Edexcel (HNC/HND). In collaboration with Staffordshire University and Pearson, Higher Education has become fundamental to our goal to be a catalyst for change through enabling social inclusion and mobility, lifelong learning and economic growth within the community. Staffordshire University are hugely supportive of the College's Higher Education aspirations and the partnership continues to grow from strength to strength.

Since 2015-16, there has been a continuous growth in our Higher Education provision. Our students are attracted by the geographic proximity of the College and the outstanding value for money of provision, including financial incentives (bursaries) for full-time students. We have excellent and proven levels of pastoral and academic support and we offer opportunity to combine work with study; significant factors which contribute towards the development of graduate skills.

The College works at the heart of the community building local aspirations and skills. Its graduates make a contribution to economic growth and social welfare not just in Halton but across neighbouring and regional authorities. Our work with local and national employers continues to enrich and support our students' experiences to equip them with graduate skills and personal attributes needed to succeed in employment and within society.

We have a resolute commitment to placing teaching and learning at the very heart of what we do; resulting in a culture of continuous improvement and enhancement of strategies, systems and procedures, which impact, first and foremost on the student experience.

In September 2015, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) confirmed that quality of standards of provision of Higher Education at Riverside College "meets expectation". Good practice was reported in relation to the effective integration of all student support services to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.

As part of the collaborative provision with Staffordshire University, Riverside College received an Ofsted Inspection of its Initial Teacher Education in April 2016 (Stage 2). The inspection report identified that the overall effectiveness of the provision was "good". A significant number of key strengths were identified including:

- A high proportion of trainees maintain or gain employment.
- Highly effective teaching by trainees who use their subject knowledge, and the professional standards well, to enable their learners to make good progress.
- The training programme is of a consistently high quality and prepares trainees well for their future teaching careers.
- The support trainees receive from tutors and mentors ensures that they have the skills they need in their working lives to deliver effective learning programmes within the further education sector.

The College also received an Ofsted Short Inspection in September 2015. The inspection report identified that the College 'continued to be good' and that 'safeguarding was effective'. A significant number of key strengths were identified including:

- Teaching, learning and assessment being consistently good, enabling the large majority of students to achieve their qualification and progress to employment and further study.
- Teachers plan a good range of learning activities to ensure that all students participate well in lessons and develop their knowledge and skills effectively.
- The college has developed an effective strategy to increase the numbers of students on science, technology and engineering programmes to meet the LEP priorities.

Riverside College is one of the highest performing Further Education colleges nationally.

The FE Week Overall College League Table for 2017 placed the College 6th nationally. The points are calculated using learner and employer feedback scores plus the destination data for both 16-18 and 19 plus learners.

The FE Week College League Position	College	Points
1	Exeter College	35
2	Barnsley College	34
3	Kendal College	34
4	Northampton College	34
5	Petroc	34
6	Riverside College	33

Based on our core metrics (with 3 positive flags and 5 asterisk indicator values in the top 10% of absolute performance) across both majority and minority modes, the initial TEF hypothesis for Riverside College is silver. However, we make our provider submission with supporting robust evidence to validate and strengthen the initial hypothesis from silver to gold.

Working in partnership with our Higher Education student representatives, this provider submission will offer a commentary against the TEF metrics as well as additional supporting quantitative and qualitative data to support the submission.

1.1 Riverside College's Vision and Values

At Riverside College we believe in the power of education to enhance and transform people's lives. We strive to be sector-leading in everything we do.

- Teaching and learning are our first priority and the needs and safety of our learners always come first.
- As members of the College we are partners in the success of the organisation and are all accountable for our results.
- High standards are at the heart of all that we do. In our pursuit of excellence we recognise that individually and collectively we can always improve.
- Within our College community we all treat each other with respect, trust, openness, care and consideration. We celebrate student and staff success.
- We are an inclusive college where we promote and protect equality and diversity.
- We work in partnership with others so that we can make a positive contribution to local, regional and national economic development.

1.2 Strategic Aims

Riverside College's strategic aims are:

1. To achieve high quality outcomes for our students by prioritising teaching and learning.

2. To continue to improve levels of efficiency and remain in outstanding financial health.

3. To maximise opportunities for growth.

Since 2014, Higher Education goals have seamlessly aligned to the College's strategic aims. This has resulted in goals that have successfully focused on:

- the use of robust quality monitoring systems to measure and enhance the quality of Higher Education provision (through prioritising year-on-year improvements in key performance indicators).
- Higher Education courses that are delivered with efficiency and provide value for money.
- Increased collaboration with internal and external stakeholders to achieve growth in the Higher Education provision.

Key contributors to this success have been:

- The prioritisation of enhancement led activities for continuous improvement facilitated through stronger student engagement and decision making involvement through the Higher Education Learner Voice, end of module evaluations, annual monitoring and through our Student Partnership Agreement (co-authored with students).
- Working with our HEI partner to ensure partnership arrangements are mutually beneficial in terms of fees, validation of courses, progression opportunities, and enhancement of provision and consistency of standards.
- Providing a local and value for money Higher Education provision to meet the needs of students who prefer to study closer to home.
- Teaching and learning approaches which harness technology but maximise learning outcomes.
- The review of all delivery models for responsiveness, though external stakeholder participation, partnership and networking, in relation to demand (market , employer driven, skills shortages), and flexible models of delivery and viability; whilst ensuring that student and employer views influenced the design, delivery and assessment of qualifications (such as the HNC Engineering and Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care programmes).
- An improvement of accessibility for non-traditional Level 4 learners into Higher Education programmes to achieve wider participation and promote community re-generation (such as the Foundation Degree in Education, the Foundation Degree in Counselling and BSc Hons Counselling (one-year top-up).

1.3 Context

1.3.1 College Context

Riverside College is a medium-sized general further education college located in Cheshire. It was formed in August 2006 following the merger of Halton College and Widnes & Runcorn Sixth Form College.

The College serves the towns of Widnes and Runcorn, which have a combined population of 126,500 (2015) as well as attracting learners from outside of the borough. It operates on three centres: Kingsway (Vocational), Cronton (A level) and CRMZ (Foundation Studies).

Halton is now part of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. Following the recent Area Based Review the College was rated as green for both quality and finances. In 2016 the College moved to a financial rating of Outstanding. The recommendation of the Area Based Review for the College to remain standalone has been approved by the board of Governors.

The College offers the following types of provision: 16-18 study programmes; adult learning programmes; apprenticeships; provision for learners with high needs; higher education and traineeships.

The College recruits a large proportion of learners from areas of high social and economic deprivation. According to the Department for Education's index of multiple deprivation, the College is located in the 27th most deprived borough and the 3rd most deprived in the Liverpool City Region. Around 26% of Halton's populace live within the top 10% most deprived areas in the country. According to the Halton Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2014/2015, 48% of Halton people live in poverty, including 26.5% of children under 16. Many people have been long term unemployed and many have poor health. Nearly 25% of Halton's population are classed as economically inactive and the number of people claiming out of work benefits is higher than the national average. 21% of households are classed as workless (NOMIS 2016). The Borough of Halton has higher than average rates of alcohol related harm, although there is a reduction in alcohol related hospital admissions for under 18s (however admissions for adults remains high).
The region has recently seen significant investment with the opening of the Mersey Gateway Bridge and Alstom's new technology centre. The College works closely with Alstom, supporting their training needs through apprenticeships and bespoke programmes. The Borough has further plans in the form of the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Plan Plus, which is designed to support the physical regeneration and transformation of Halton.

Whilst recognising that it must have a deep understanding of the Borough's many complex and challenging needs, the College has high ambitions and expectations of all its students, staff, parents and employers. Numerous pro-active strategies are in place to address and support the varied and complex needs of the students it serves.

1.3.2 Higher Education Context

In Halton, there are 22.3% of residents with higher education qualifications compared with a national average of 37.1%. In addition, the progression of young people to higher education across the Liverpool City Region is variable. In Knowsley, Liverpool and Halton, less than 28% of young residents participate in Higher Education. (Source: HEFCE Polar 3).

Riverside College work actively with HEFCE funded Shaping Futures, a collaborative outreach programme, delivered across schools within the Liverpool City Region to support the most disadvantaged young people to progress into Higher Education. We are making good progress against a set of key deliverables for outreach to schools within priority wards within the region.

Higher Education cohorts at Riverside College are predominately mature (69% are 21 or over: TEF 3 metrics) with the majority mode of delivery being part-time (78%: TEF 3 metrics). A significant majority of our part-time students progress internally from our Level 3 provision. The majority of students are consistently drawn from areas of least participation in Higher Education. Our TEF data indicates 65% recruited from POLAR quintiles 1 and 2 in 2015/16 and 63% in 2016/17 (TEF 3 metrics).

The proportion of males and females changed slightly in 2016/17 with 51% male and 49% female; against 52% male and 48% female in 2015/16.

TEF 3 metrics indicate 9% of students with a declared learning difficulty or disability (2016/17); thus showing a slight increase of 2% on 2015/16.

Higher Education Students: declared disability (2016-17)

Academic Year	Number of HE students with declared disability	Number of students in receipt of DSA
16-17	10	6

In terms of ethnicity, our TEF 3 metrics demonstrate that 100% of our full-time students declared their ethnicity as white and 3% of part-time students declared their ethnicity as 'other', which is representative of the local community with approximately 4% of the population drawn from ethnic groups other than white British.

1.3.3 In Partnership with Employers

At Riverside College, we appreciate the importance of offering Higher Education qualifications that are relevant to the needs of employers. The College makes a significant contribution to the local economy and has an important role in supporting local businesses. With this in mind, local employers have been involved in the design of our higher education courses (and most recently, the Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care).

The College continues to grow its Higher Education provision. It does by responding to external and internal business growth opportunities to achieve wider participation and by improving accessibility for non-traditional Level 4 learners into Higher Education programmes. External and internal stakeholder participation and the student voice of Level 3 learners are captured to evaluate demand for new pathways/programmes, modes of study and flexible on-line delivery options.

The Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has given clear guidance on the skills areas which will grow and in response to this, the College continues to make every effort to make sure that our students are prepared with the work-ready, personal skills and knowledge they will need to be successful in employment in growth areas of employment.

1.3.4 National Student Survey (contextualised information)

Results of the National Student Survey (2016) revealed that nationally 88% of Higher Education students were satisfied with their course, while Riverside College achieved an impressive taught satisfaction rate of 96%; placing them in the top 10 providers for national student satisfaction.

The results of the National Student Survey (2017) were negatively impacted by the fact that our partner university failed to include two of Riverside College's larger part-time cohorts in their HESA (2016) return. This unfortunately resulted in students from both courses (Foundation Degree in Counselling Year 3 and Certificate/Post Graduate Certificate in Education Year 2) being prevented from completing an NSS questionnaire in Spring 2017. The same year groups had both reported 100% course satisfaction in NSS 2016. If their voice had been included and, as expected, mirrored feedback received from both cohorts on our internal learner voice and end of module surveys in 2017, we believe that this would have given us positive flags in the core metrics to the value of 2.5.

2 Teaching Quality

2.1 The Quality of Teaching

The TEF 3 metrics demonstrate that full-time student satisfaction with the 'teaching on my course' is 7.1% above benchmark at 91.3% resulting in an asterisk indicator value in the top 10% of absolute performance. Similarly, there are two further asterisk indictors for full-time students for assessment and feedback and academic support. Assessment and feedback is 4.9% above benchmark at 83.4% and academic support is 7% above benchmark at 90.8%. High level of satisfaction on full-time provision is also reflected in the positive flag achieved for continuation, with metrics demonstrating 5.7% above benchmark at 90.2%, resulting in a positive z-score of 2.0.

As mentioned earlier, the results of the National Student Survey (2017) were impacted by the fact that our partner university did not include two part-time Riverside College cohorts in their HESA (2016) return; it is, therefore, assumed that our TEF 3 metrics were impacted negatively by this omission as in subsequent years NSS results for both courses were as follows:

Foundation Degree in Counselling Year 3 (p/t) – NSS Results	2015-16	2014-15
The teaching on my course	100%	93%
Assessment and feedback	100%	81%
Academic support	100%	86%
Overall satisfaction	100%	90%

Post Compulsory Education and Training Year 2 (p/t) – NSS Results	2015-16	2014-15
The teaching on my course	100%	88%
Assessment and feedback	99%	98%
Academic support	100%	91%
Overall satisfaction	100%	96%

The College are making a compelling case here to support the assumption that if the two courses above had not been omitted from NSS 2017, then we would have achieved a positive flag for 'teaching on my course' for the part-time head-count which is our majority mode study. In total, across the two courses, 38 students were excluded from NSS 2017. If their voice had been included, we believe that this would have given us positive flags in the core metrics to the value of 2.5 (which in the initial hypothesis would have suggested a starting point of TEF Gold).

Feedback from Riverside College internal Higher Education learner voice surveys in 2016-17, for both courses demonstrated excellent feedback on the quality of teaching, assessment and feedback and academic support (with the significant majority of results falling in the agree or most agree categories).

There is also clear evidence within the TEF 3 metrics for Riverside College (part-time /majority mode) to support the fact that the quality of assessment and feedback and academic support are a very high standard. There are 2 positive flags and 2 asterisk indicators.

The TEF 3 metrics demonstrate that part-time student satisfaction with 'assessment and feedback' is 8.9% above benchmark at 91.9% resulting in a flag and an asterisk indicator with a z-score of 2.2. Similarly, for academic support the satisfaction rate is 11.9% above benchmark for academic support, resulting in a flag and an asterisk indicator with a z-score of 2.9. High level of satisfaction for part-time provision is therefore reflected in such positive TEF 3 metrics.

In NSS 2017, Riverside College's actual overall satisfaction with teaching and learning was 84.62%; this despite the fact that approximately 38 part-time students had been excluded from the survey.
In addition, we have successfully delivered (for the past 2 years) 1-year top up degrees in Sport and Counselling. Neither programmes are included in the NSS survey, but outcomes for students for both of these programmes are very good.

Continuation and Achievement Rates on Top-Up Degree programmes

Programme	2015-16 % continuation	2015-16 achievement	2016-17 % continuation	2016-17 achievement
BSc Hons Counselling (p/t)	16/21 retained	16 achieved	22/24 retained	21 achieved 1 TBC
		11 (69%) with 1st class honours		13/22 (59%) with 1st class honours
BA (Hons) Sport Coaching and Sport Development (f/t)	12 /13 retained	12 achieved	9/11 retained	9 achieved
		2 (17%) with 1st class honours		

2.2 Monitoring Quality of Teaching and Learning

There is a Higher Education Quality Cycle in place which ensures that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is monitored closely throughout the academic year by manager and peer walk throughs and graded observations. In 2016-17, Riverside College introduced its Great Teaching initiative; at the heart of which lies the ethos that all staff whatever their grading profile have the aptitude for great teaching, the belief that their teaching can improve and that they are determined to be the very best teachers that they can be. Central to this strategy is 360 degree feedback on performance including student perceptions about teaching effectiveness which then informs teacher development targets.

Teaching, learning and assessment are very good. The College has invested significant time and resources in the development of teachers' professional practice, resulting in 100% of staff teaching on Higher Education programmes at Riverside College having a grading profile of good or better (of which 33% is outstanding practice). This has helped to support continuous improvements in outcomes for students.

In 2016-17, Observation reports indicate that staff demonstrate:

- Highly effective planning and differentiated teaching approaches to ensure that students' individual needs are met.
- Active learning strategies that require students to do much more than just listen
- Effective use of information learning technology/digital learning approaches to enhance the learning; including the use of highly developed learning materials that embed digital media.
- Excellent use of assessment for learning strategies which ensure collaboration through involvement of students in the formative assessment processes
- Very good levels of stretch and challenge that ensure students are developing critical thinking and reasoning skills; and are able to present balanced arguments.
- Highly effective teacher/student relationships which promote mutual respect, integrity and professionalism.
- Effective development of study skills through the Higher Education tutorial scheme of work content.

Exemplar comments from observation reports of Higher Education teaching and learning staff, include:

- *"Students are clearly enjoying the session and making excellent progress".*
- *"Highly skilled questioning technique [used] which checks learning and develops understanding*".
- *"Key points expanded subtly and amplified when put in real work context".*
- *"The teaching and learning promotes diversity and supports equality of opportunity"*
- *"The standard and pace of work challenges and stretches all learners"*
- *"Students evidence clear progression of learning, including higher level thinking skills such as analysis and evaluation. This is evident through the sections focussed on problem solving".*

100% of staff teaching on Higher Education programmes are qualified teachers; with many having undertaken a post compulsory teacher training qualification internally at Riverside College.

The quality of teaching and learning on Higher Education programmes at Riverside College is something that we are very proud about. Ungraded walk thoughs have demonstrated that teaching is differentiated and pitched at the correct FHEQ level. Feedback on the quality of teaching and learning from Higher Education peer observations is also consistently good or better.

Our external examiner reports gave very positive feedback on curriculum design, delivery, assessment and feedback (see page 10).

In 2016-17, 13 out of 22 students (59%) achieved 1st class honours degrees on the BSc (Hons) Counselling. Learner Voice, end of module surveys and examiners' reports have been consistently positive.

Curriculum developments in course design (reflected in Higher Education schemes of work) have continued to provide opportunity for students to become more involved in the formative assessment process, therefore enhancing opportunities for assessment for learning through successful peer and self assessment.

The curriculum on all Higher Education programmes combines a very good balance of vocational and theoretical mix; whilst supporting students to develop higher order, skills of critical thinking and analysis. The curriculum is in line with the subject benchmarks to develop a greater understanding of skills, qualities and attributes required of employees within each sector.

Use of Wamedu (a secure social network for Education that offers students and staff the opportunity to collaborate and share education content in safe learning environment) has supported extended learning; students can access further relevant reading/resources relating to theories, principles and models under investigation and engage in discussion about key content. Information Learning Technology (ILT) is well embedded into the curriculum and observations report that students benefit greatly from video tutorials, discussion forums and e-learning teaching and learning approaches such as Nearpod, Kahoot and Socrative.

There is a commitment to continuous development of new and existing Higher Education teachers through our Staff Development Programme and also through our Higher Education Learning Community which meets on a monthly basis. A key focus of this community is the cross discipline moderation of assessments. At Riverside College we are committed to developing the 'dual professional' and developing staff who are expert in their own teaching discipline but who are also fully appreciative of theories and principles of learning that lead to deeper knowledge and conceptual understanding.

New teachers receive support through the New Staff Induction Support Programme and managers through the College Leadership Programme. In addition, a bi-monthly Learning Matters community provides a monthly forum for the College Management Team to reflect on pedagogy and share best teaching practices across all levels.

2.3 Supporting Teaching and Learning

To support teaching and learning Riverside College provide opportunities for our students to benefit from:

- Study support workshops
- Voluntary work
- Study trips and visits and guest speakers
- Higher Education New Student Day
- Engagement with quality assurance through Higher Education Academic boards
- Work based learning activities.

In Riverside College's QAA HER report, good practice was reported in relation to the effective integration of all student support services to enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential. Pastoral care is seen as a key strength and both academic tutorials and the Pastoral Support Worker for Adults and Higher Education play a valuable role in developing students' confidence, mind-set, resilience and academic ability; supporting them to work towards achieving their goals on graduation. Attendance, retention, and punctuality are reported on, on a weekly basis and student achievement is tracked through the Higher Education mark book. Amongst other criteria, we monitor student retention data in relation to ethnicity, disability and age.

Any students who are presenting as a 'cause for concern', in relation to attendance, effort or personal issues are discussed at team level and also at cause for concern meetings (held with the Pastoral Support Worker for Adults and Higher Education and the manager of Higher Education). Timely action is taken and an appropriate intervention is put in place in response to causes for concern. It is the College's policy to track and monitor student achievement and progress through HE Assessment and Academic boards, so that timely interventions can result in improved retention and success. We have developed a broad set of indicators about student engagement, which include not only attendance but also submission of work,

engagement with Moodle (our virtual learning environment) and access to the College's library resources. Academic and pastoral tutorials, small class sizes and individualised support are essential in retaining students.

2.4 Tutorial Support for Higher Education students

Our personal tutorial strategy enables our Higher Education teachers to have a full picture of the learner assessing performance and support development from a range of perspectives.

Each learner receives at least one tutorial per semester. They frequently have the opportunity to attend two tutorials during any module and additional tutorials can be arranged outside of the rota to suit the learner. This ensures that learners have access to quality tutorials conducted by those teaching the modules.

Learners participate with their first tutorials early in the programme; this clarifies the benefits of the tutorial system and assures each learner of the value of one to one discussions where the focus is on the individual and his/her needs. Personal tutorials are supported by a range of documentation including a learner self-assessment checklist and a tutorial guide.

Personal tutors use the Higher Education Induction Questionnaire/Academic Skills Profile and robust initial assessment to provide them with a full profile of the student on entry and to identify any additional learning needs. Learners who indicate a learning need are given a priority tutorial before half-term to assist and review progress in terms of DSA application. The tutor is able to differentiate support according to need, this may involve a referral to Study Services who provide diagnostic support and DSA information or a referral to the Higher Education and Adult Pastoral Support Worker who can provide further additional tutorial support to maximise the chance of student success. The impact of our tutorial system can be seen in the NSS 2016 for Academic Support and most importantly, it enriches and enhances the student experience.

NSS 2016 and 2017 Results for Academic Support

NSS – Academic Support	2015-16	2016-17
HND Computing and Systems Development	91%	Non-reportable
HND Sport (Health, Fitness and Exercise)	97%	Non-reportable
Foundation Degree in Counselling	100%	Excluded
Post Compulsory Education and Training	100%	Excluded

The College's formal staff performance management system works alongside our Great Teaching Strategy (embedded within which are the Education and Training Foundation Professional Standards). The Great Teaching Strategy (introduced in September 2016) was designed to support the College's move towards an outstanding grade in our next inspection of Further Education and Skills.

Based on sound evidence based practice, this new and innovative approach was designed to empower teachers to take ownership of their own development through the use of democratic and coaching leadership approaches. Significant time and resources have been allocated to Great Teaching. The process involves supportive observations from peers and trained observers using the Education and Training Foundation Standards as criteria for performance, extensive student and peer feedback, teacher self-assessment and 1 to 1 coaching sessions led by trained coaches.

Almost 18 months into the strategy there are clear and tangible benefits for teachers and students. Teachers are noticeably taking an active and increased role in their own development. This has led to a growth mind-set, where there is a strong culture of belief that teaching can always be improved; whether through traditional teaching methods or through championing smarter and more effective ways of working (for example embracing digital learning strategies). Staff are enthusiastic and committed to ensuring excellent outcomes for every student.

There has been an associated impact on students. Students have benefitted from high expectations, care and support from all staff who use their expertise to deliver teaching, learning, assessment and support to meet each individual student's needs. Staff are able to draw on excellent subject knowledge, imaginative and well-chosen teaching and learning techniques to develop students' skills and understanding at a very high level. The sharing of best practice through cross College CPD sessions, the Great Teaching Moodle and through the Higher Education Learning Community has enhanced performance.

Our Higher Education students are becoming more self-aware and self-assured; their standard of work is high and the quality of teaching and learning is adding value and increasing achievement on programme. We have noticed an improvement in the resilience and motivation of our Higher Education students; which has resulted in improved retention and a determination to succeed to the best of their ability.

2.5 Quality Monitoring

Riverside College has a number of processes for monitoring performance in the context of student outcomes and experiences on Higher Education programmes. These include:

- meticulous monitoring of course planning (schemes of work, Moodle, course handbook content)
- dynamic weekly programme management reports on retention and attendance;
- weekly SMT operational meetings, where day to day key performance indicators are systematically reviewed and actions for improvement agreed;
- monitoring of results by module/unit through assessment board reports;
- monitoring of academic board reports and course performance mid and end of year.

Both qualitative and quantitative data is used systematically to evaluate engagement and retention in order to gather evidence of impact for accountability, to assess value for money and to support new developments and the enhancement of the student experience. Academic monitoring systematically leads to a structured Higher Education enhancement plan, the contents of which are supported by external examiner comments and verified by both student representatives and our Senior Management Team. Below is a sample of external examiner feedback from 2016-17 reports:

2.6 External Examiner Feedback – Higher Education Programmes

Certificate/Post Graduate Certificate in Education

- The External Examiner rated highly the practice based learning and teaching opportunities effective in preparing students to meet the module learning outcomes and relevant professional standards.
- The External Examiner rated highly the levels of satisfaction regarding the quality and consistency of assessment feedback provided to students.

HND Computing and Systems Development

"All units are supported by detailed assessment strategies and contextual grading statements, for the higher grades. The sampling confirms that the tutors have adopted a consistent approach toward the evaluation of submissions and the determination of grades. Feedback is detailed, both written and verbal, this being confirmed by the representative student group"

Foundation Degree in Counselling and BSc (Hons) Counselling

- Feedback from external examiners for both FD/BSc programmes was very positive in relation to quality of submissions and level and depth of feedback provided by tutors.

2.7 Enhancement and Student Consultation through the Higher Education Learner Voice

Central to all quality assurance reviews and quality improvement of our Higher Education provision is student consultation. We use a range of methods to collect evidence to support evaluation of impact including end of module surveys, bi-monthly Higher Education Learner Voice surveys, student group surveys, Higher Education Learner Voice forums, attendance of Higher Education learner representatives at the Higher Education Learning Community (where the Student Partnership Agreement is reviewed and

updated annually), student representative attendance at course team meetings and Higher Education Academic boards. We also use learner voice feedback to continue to work with our widening participation students to identify activities and interventions to support retention.

Our Higher Education student focus group surveys are led by student representatives and encourage a student-led approach to identifying reasons for both positive and, on rare occasions, less positive responses to HE surveys. The student representative has the responsibility of probing to identify any root causes of any areas for concern, capturing a group consensus and bringing realistic solutions to the Higher Education Learner Voice forum to improve the student experience.

Actions taken as a result of student feedback are disseminated to students through "You said, we did" posters, by the student representative to their group and through the HE Learner Voice Moodle. An example of change that has impacted positively was the updating of hardware in the Higher Education dedicated Study Room; as students had reported slow performance of some PCs.

To-date, Higher Education learner voice surveys have focused on induction, curriculum design, marketing of the Higher Education provision, the role of the Higher Education ambassador, fees, student financial support, ways in which to enhance the quality of provision, transition to Higher Education arrangements, the development of study skills for progression and support to gain employment through careers events.

Most important to us are the comments received from students on quality of teaching, learning, feedback and academic support, of which below are examples:

BSc (Hons) Counselling:
"I have enjoyed every lesson of this module. The teaching style of the tutor was without doubt the best I have ever experienced. Every effort was made by the tutor to make the learning experience interesting and involved. She is a first class lecturer."

Foundation Degree Counselling:
"I have fully enjoyed this module. I have had the opportunity to develop my counselling skills with helpful feedback. I have been given a fantastic amount of support and feel like I have grown so much personally thanks to my tutor's help. I can't wait for what next year brings!"

Certificate/Post Graduate Certificate in Education:
"Feedback was always prompt and provided opportunity for stretch and challenge. One to one tutorials were regular with my tutor. She would set individual learning goals and targets and always pushed for me to improve". "Tutors were excellent at teaching this course. Lessons were varied and always interesting'. '

Foundation Degree in Sport Coaching and PE
"Excellent support from teachers (helpful, accommodating and reassuring)".

Foundation Degree in Health and Social Care:
"The tutors were always there to help us whenever we needed them. Their unique styles helped us to the best of our abilities and made the lectures more fun and challenging".

Feedback from students demonstrates the consistent quality of teaching, learning, assessment, feedback and academic support at Riverside College; thus reflecting our culture of continuous improvement and enhancement which puts students first and foremost and central to our vision and values. This internal feedback also triangulates with our TEF 3 metrics.

3 Learning Environment

At Riverside College, we have recruited inspiring and highly skilled Higher Education teachers with vast industrial experience to ensure learning helps our students to reach their full potential. Teachers offer outstanding support within a friendly learning environment which encourages high standards at all times.

Over the last few years, Riverside College has invested over £12 million in its campuses in order to create state of the art learning facilities and modern social areas. We have new computer suites, engineering workshops, learning centres and social areas. Teaching rooms have been refurbished to provide a more student-centred learning experience. Further investment has been made in the IT infrastructure to improve the speed of the wi-fi and our student portal has been enhanced with added functionality for students. The college has also invested heavily in i-pads to promote interactive learning; this has been strengthened by the introduction of an I-pad Project where 8 curriculum areas now have access to a dedicated trolley of 16 i-pads for use by their students. In addition, the College has 90 i-pads available for use across both campuses.

Learning is supported through Learning Resource Centres at both our Kingsway and Cronton Campuses providing access to a wide range of facilities, resources and support. There is also a dedicated study room for Higher Education students at our Kingsway Campus (where the significant majority of our Higher Education courses take place).

The Learning Resource Centre staff at both Kingsway and Cronton Campus support students effectively and have delivered sessions to develop academic writing.

Students have access to e-books and e-resources through the College intranet. Riverside College's learning resource centres have an extensive range of academic texts to support learning. E-books, digital magazines, on-line databases and digital archives are accessible through our Go-Research platform.

Students who are enrolled onto programmes validated by Staffordshire University are also able to access their extensive catalogue of e-resources. There is a library digital induction available to support students and staff to make best use of library resources and facilities.

Each Higher Education course is supported by a comprehensive virtual learning environment (Moodle), where internal audits have reported strong evidence of the use of a wide range of teaching, learning and assessment resources. Moodle is used extensively across Higher Education programmes. Resources available to students via Moodle include programme handbooks, schemes of work and extensive lesson and study skills resources. There are dedicated Higher Education Moodle sites to support all Higher Education students including a Higher Education Study Skills Moodle and a Higher Education Student Support Moodle.

In an internal Higher Education Learner Voice survey carried out in February 2017, 100% of students rated their programme handbook to be very useful.

In NSS 2016, 85% of Higher Education students agreed that learning resources supported their learning well, and 93% confirmed that they had been able to access general IT resources when needed. All but one student who completed the NSS Survey in 2017 fully agreed that the College's library resources had supported their learning well.

In September 2017, a further significant investment was made on physical and online resources to support Higher Education programmes.

The provision of hardware and software across all teaching rooms and the learning resource centres is reviewed annually to assess currency/fit for purpose and to identify any additional resource requirements. New hardware and software are purchased annually to suit user and course delivery requirements. For example, to support the HND Computing and Systems Development programme, two new suites of computers were introduced in 2016-17 with specialist software including Unity (for Gaming), Blender (3D Modelling, Python, Visual Studio and Virtual Reality software.

The College uses a range of learning resources to support and enhance students' learning and development; not only in relation to their subject discipline but also wider skills such as independent learning, critical thinking and research.

We undertook a survey at the end of 2016-17 to determine the extent to which the student's programme of study and Higher Education experience had impacted their employability skills across the duration of one academic year. Distance travelled from the start of the academic year to its end was significant across a number of key areas including:

- Thinking critically and analytically (from 29.6% to 79.96% good or better).
- Reading and comprehending academic material (from 39.47% to 89.47% good or better)
- Becoming an independent learner (from 44.63% to 84.62% good or better)
- Working effectively with others (from 56.41% to 87.18% good or better)

In Summer 2017, the College opened its IDEA Centre. The IDEA Centre offers our students and their employers innovative training facilities including an advanced manufacturing workshop, a digital technology laboratory and electronics suite, a process control workshop, a health and fitness laboratory, a project management suite, a 3D modelling suite and an Industry 4.0 suite which will prepare our Engineering students for the Industry 4.0 trend of automation and data exchange in manufacturing technologies. The IDEA Centre was part funded by the Liverpool City Region's £232 million Growth Deal (secured by the Local Enterprise Partnership) and is sponsored by local employers in a range of sectors including Automation, Aviation and Rail. The IDEA Centre provides a dynamic learning environment where our Sports, Engineering, Health and Social Care and Computing Higher Education students can develop the skill sets required to use the latest advanced technologies and to drive productivity improvements within their own field of work. In doing so, it will increase the capability of regional business to compete in global markets.

Our HNC Engineering students benefit from using a fully operational and comprehensive Pneumatics and Hydraulics workshop and an advanced materials testing laboratory with a high focus on NDT (Non Destructive Testing) giving learners to opportunity to use state of the art Ultrasonic's and Magnetic Particle testing equipment. Students have access to the latest digital fabrication equipment for prototyping, such as 3D printers. There is a strong focus on computer science and computer programming, virtual reality technologies, sensors, and robotics, flow level control systems, and pneumatic and hydraulic systems.

Our HND Computing students benefit from brand new state of the art IT suites and specialist software which develop the skills and competences to access many exciting career opportunities in Computing and IT.

Our Foundation Degree and Top-up Degree Sport students benefit from studying in a health and fitness laboratory where they have first-hand experience of using ergonometric equipment to measure heart rates, an industrial treadmill for gait analysis, heal strike and posture and balance, a Concept 2 running machine for biometric analysis and Quintic Sports Video Analysis Software, for Sports biomechanics and performance analysis. This enables them to combine theory with practical application and develop essential skills for the health profession and leisure industries.

Our Health and Social Care students benefit from our new bespoke clinical practice ward with the latest equipment which allows student to gain both theory and invaluable practical experience which will support them to employment in their chosen sector.

New in 2016-17 to our Kingsway Campus was a fully equipped Counselling suite, allowing our Foundation Degree and Top-up Degree Counselling students to practise and develop essential skills in a realistic work environment.

Learning does not just take place within the classroom, but also between lessons. Higher Education students benefit from trips and visits both locally and regionally such as Daresbury Science and Technology Park where our HND Computing students assisted in the organisation and judging of its First Lego League competition at the Sci Tech Daresbury laboratories; and Media City in Salford where they experienced a tour around the studio's electronics/IT infrastructure.

In 2017, Riverside College Counselling Foundation and Degree students and staff partnered with USA charity Sidewalk Talk to create its first UK division and they provided the very first community listening events in the UK during Mental Health Awareness Week 2017 (including working with local residents in community settings). Following the recent tragic events of the Manchester bombing, Counselling degree teachers met with The Tim Parry Johnathan Ball Foundation for Peace to discuss how Sidewalk Talk volunteers could support their work. As a result, the college's Counselling students were asked to support at the One Love Manchester concert.

Sidewalk Talk community listening events involve inviting members of the public to sit with volunteers and talk about anything they choose. Listeners do not give advice or make judgements; they just listen with empathy and can point in the direction of further support services if needed. Supporting people locally at community sessions and at the One Love Manchester concert provided an invaluable learning opportunity for students by developing their confidence and understanding of counselling skills and mental health.

Most recently, Riverside College hosted The World Health Innovation Summit (WHIS) which provided a platform for speakers to exchange knowledge on the healthcare industry and for communities to share ideas to help improve healthcare services. This was the first WHIS event to be held at the College and was in partnership with Sidewalk Talk. An audience of almost two hundred Riverside College counselling students listened to inspirational talks from notable guest speakers including; Labour MP and President of the Labour Campaign for Mental Health Luciana Berger, CEO of the WHIS Gareth Presch, and Traci Ruble founder and director of Sidewalk Talk.

4 Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

Riverside College Higher Education students perform well in relation to learning gain and distance travelled. This is particularly the case because many students are recruited from areas of low participation in Higher Education, are mature, following a part-time mode of study and may not have achieved well in compulsory education. Overall Higher Education achievement rates have been consistently above 95% for the past 3 academic years.

Strategies to reduce the gap in attainment and progression of students who are at risk of not achieving or who are from disadvantaged backgrounds are important to Riverside College. The TEF metric data clearly shows that there has been no negative impact for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, supplementary splits demonstrate two positive flags in the column headed 'National IMD' for academic support. The hypothesis here being that disadvantaged students value the level of academic support in supporting them to retain on programme and achieve.

The College acknowledge that there is a single negative blue flag (-) in the TEF 3 metric splits (part-time mode) for highly skilled employment or further study (male). Our reported TEF 3 metrics for students gaining highly skilled employment is 73.3% against a national average of 78%.

As discussed earlier on Page 4 of this report, the college recruits 33% of our part-time students from POLAR quintile 1 and a further 28% from POLAR quintile 2. This has an impact on the social and financial situation for our students. Our part-time students are not entitled to a maintenance loan, so consequently, a large number of students have part-time jobs and combine work with study to support their income. Moreover, the ability to seek highly skilled worked is directly influenced by their personal and family responsibilities and commitments. Many students on our Foundation Degree in Counselling progress onto the BSc (Hons) Counselling (top-up year), or work as counsellors on a part-time basis in local community and educational settings. Some train on a part-time basis to teach. Our post compulsory education and training graduates of 2016-17 are all now employed but a small minority have chosen to pursue a role in a learner support /mentor capacity as opposed to a full-teaching commitment which takes them away from the area. That aside, DHLE 2017 results demonstrate that 80% of the HNC Engineering graduates (2015-16) are now working and 20% are working and studying. As the majority of the HNC Engineering graduates are under 25, they may be required to obtain further work related and vocational experience within their field before applying for higher level positions. This could feasibly take longer than 6 months for graduates to achieve their career aspirations of highly skilled roles (therefore impacting on DHLE data).

However, that aside, in the supplementary LEO metrics and flag profile across all splits, TEF metrics (part-time) demonstrate a further two asterisk indicators for sustained employment or further study (3% above benchmark at 91.7%) and above medium earnings threshold or further study (1.1% above benchmark at 93.1%). The same metrics for full-time mode of study are less positive but as mentioned earlier, this may well be attributed to social and family responsibilities; the demographics of the area from which the college recruits and the need to gain further experience before securing highly skilled employment.

In relation to continuation (retention), internal records show that there was an in-year retention rate achieved on programme in 2016-17 of above 90% for all Higher Education programmes. TEF Year 3 metrics show a positive flag for continuation and not applicable for part-time mode of study. This may be due in part to the change of funding arrangements in September 2016 for the significant number of our part students (new starters on programme) from indirectly funded by our partner university to directly funded. In 2016/17, in year retention (continuation) rates for part-time courses ending July 2017 were as follows:

Course	In-year retention rates (continuation 2016-17)
BSc (Hons) Counselling	22 out of 24 retained (92%)
Certificate/Post graduate Certificate in Education Year 2	21 out of 21 retained (100%)
Foundation Degree in Counselling Year 3 (11 of which progressed onto the BSC (Hons) top-up in Counselling)	15 out of 15 retained (100%)

4.1 Recognition of Student Achievement

The College recognises its Higher Education student achievement through a monthly student of the month award, for criteria such as commitment to study, overcoming personal challenges and effort.
Our annual Higher Education graduation ceremony is attended by governors, representatives from local businesses, family and staff to celebrate and award students for their achievements. Student of the Year awards are given to exceptional students who have exceeded their potential or overcome personal challenges.

In 2016, Student of the Year was awarded to a HNC Engineering graduate who ten years' previously in 2005 enrolled onto the Foundation Construction Award at Riverside College. He then progressed and successfully achieved qualifications at Level 1 and 2 before completing the Level 3 Extended Diploma in Mechanical Manufacturing Engineering as part of an Apprenticeship programme at Riverside College.
He is now permanently employed in a management role at a local Engineering company. This graduate was a worthy recipient of student of the year and a fantastic ambassador for staying local for Higher Education by achieving a distinction grade overall on programme.

In 2017, student of year was awarded to a Foundation Degree in Counselling graduate who became fully absorbed in every aspect of learning, including being the voice for the students as a student representative over the 3-year duration of the programme. The student took on every ounce of experience from the course to secure employment and build a business as a counsellor working with local clients presenting with addictions.

5 Conclusion

The College's commitment to a culture of continuous improvement, high quality teaching, learning, assessment and feedback and stakeholder partnership is central to its key goals of efficiency, quality and growth. By putting the student at the very heart of what we do, we are able to demonstrate improved learning gain, a safe and collaborative learning culture (at the core of which lies the Higher Education Student Partnership Agreement) and a learning environment which is dynamic and where staff drive improvement through a willingness to be the best they can be. Our provision is growing in response to employer and local needs and we have an unrelenting passion to support all of our students to develop the knowledge and skills for success in life and employment.

We are confident that this submission reflects the culture and values of Higher Education at Riverside College of which we as a growing provider are very proud.